

Health Update

A Call For A Measles-Free Future The “Drive To Curb Measles” Kicks off Nationwide With the Goal of Eliminating Measles in the U.S.

(NAPS)—A group of parent and professional associations has taken steps to help work towards a measles-free future in America.

Representatives of the National Partnership for Immunization (NPI), the National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners (NAPNAP), National Medical Association (NMA), Every Child By Two (ECBT), and the Partnership for Prevention (PfP) gathered recently to kick off the “Drive to Curb Measles.” The program, sponsored by Merck Vaccine Division, is intended to increase public awareness about measles and encourage vaccination for appropriate persons. The associations maintain that an increased commitment to universal vaccination is needed to completely eliminate measles in the U.S., just as smallpox was eradicated worldwide 22 years ago, and polio has been eliminated from the Americas and Western Pacific region within the last seven years.

“Vaccinator” Tells the Tale

The “Drive to Curb Measles” program aims to educate parents and children about the seriousness of measles, the speed of contagion, and the importance of vaccination.

The “Drive” features “Vaccinator,” a superhero whose mission is the elimination of measles and other infectious diseases. She will travel in the Measles Bug, a red-spot enhanced Beetle, to various



cities where she will conduct short interactive presentations with local children’s theater performers demonstrating the need for vaccination. A local pediatric nurse practitioner will provide information about measles and vaccination to parents and answer their questions.

Measles Still a Danger

Despite more than 30 years of vaccination, measles still exists in the United States. According to the CDC, the number of cases reported through April 8, 2001 is up 200 percent from the same period last year.

The airborne virus, considered by the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) one of the most contagious infections known to man, can spread through an entire room from just one cough. While initial symptoms of measles infection may appear mild, including a runny nose, cough, and the traditional red rash, the disease can progress rapidly and lead to pneumonia, encephalitis, and

even death.

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) of the CDC, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), and the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) have issued recommendations that children be vaccinated against measles between the ages of 12 and 15 months, and a second time between 4 and 6 years of age.

“Measles is a highly contagious, vaccine preventable disease,” said Dr. David Neumann of the National Partnership for Immunization. “We must remain vigilant in ensuring that our children are vaccinated in accordance with the guidelines recommended by the ACIP, the AAP, and the AAFP.”

Almost There!

“We’ve come a long way with measles vaccination, but the problem still exists,” said Dr. Neumann. “Last year, there were only 81 measles cases reported to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) compared to 55,000 cases reported during 1989-1991. On the other hand, this year in King County, Washington, eleven cases of measles were reported by February 22—that’s the most significant number of cases in that area since 1991. Continued vigilance, coupled with universal vaccination, is important in helping to prevent future outbreaks.”