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BACK-TO-SCHOOL PLANS SHOULD INCLUDE REQUIRED VACCINATIONS

Immunizations Save Teaching Time, Reduce Misery and Save Lives

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – To prevent the spread of diseases and to keep our kids of all ages and their classmates safe, healthy and in school learning, all students in Tennessee, from kindergarten to college, must have proof of immunizations before they can start school. State leaders of health and education say it's best to get those important vaccines now to avoid longer wait times later and to ensure a smooth beginning to the 2017 school year.

"As a parent, there is a lot on our plate before a new school year, but as a physician I know one of the most important is getting vaccinated to prevent communicable diseases that can quickly spread in group settings like schools," said Tennessee Department of Health Commissioner John Dreyzehner, MD, MPH. "Beat the rush and give the vaccine time to start working. See your healthcare provider or local health department and help our kids get a great start."

"All classroom time is important, including those first days of a new school year when teachers and students are building their routines and relationships," said Tennessee Department of Education Commissioner Candice McQueen. "By having all necessary paperwork and documentation of immunizations in place, parents help to ensure their children will not miss any valuable learning time."

"Parents and students may not be aware of some required immunizations for college admission, including those to prevent meningococcal meningitis, measles, mumps, rubella, chicken pox and in some cases Hepatitis B," said Tennessee Board of Regents Chancellor Flora Tydings. "It's best to contact the school as early as possible to learn what is needed so important classroom hours are not missed and communicable diseases prevented."

Requirements for school vaccinations in Tennessee include:

- Kindergarteners and other children enrolling in a Tennessee school for the first time must provide schools with a complete Official Tennessee Immunization Certificate before classes begin. The certificate must be signed by a qualified healthcare provider or verified by the state's Immunization Information System.
- All current students entering seventh grade are required to give the school a limited Official Tennessee Immunization Certificate showing they have had a second dose of chickenpox vaccine (or a history of the illness) and a booster shot for tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis. The HPV cancer vaccine and first meningococcal meningitis vaccine are not required for school attendance, but are recommended by pediatricians and public health experts for all children at this age and can be given at the same visit.

- Incoming college students in Tennessee public colleges who will live in on-campus housing must provide proof of immunization against meningococcal meningitis after age 16. Most private colleges also have requirements for this vaccine and some schools require it of all new students. Check with your college for details.

For more information about school immunization requirements in Tennessee, visit <http://tn.gov/health/article/required-immunizations>.

The Tennessee Department of Health encourages all parents of preteens and teens to ask their healthcare providers about getting the human papillomavirus or HPV vaccine, which can protect against a variety of HPV-associated cancers than can develop over a lifetime. The HPV vaccine is available through most healthcare providers and all county health departments. Children and teens under age 19 without private insurance coverage for the vaccine may receive HPV vaccine and all other routine vaccines through most healthcare providers and all health departments for only a small administration fee through the federal Vaccines for Children program. To learn more about HPV, visit www.cdc.gov/hpv/index.html.

The mission of the Tennessee Department of Health is to protect, promote and improve the health and prosperity of people in Tennessee. TDH has facilities in all 95 counties and provides direct services for more than one in five Tennesseans annually as well as indirect services for everyone in the state, including emergency response to health threats, licensure of health professionals, regulation of health care facilities and inspection of food service establishments. Learn more about TDH services and programs at www.tn.gov/health.

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