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NEWS RELEASE

CHILDREN UNDER TWO VULNERABLE TO VACCINE-PREVENTABLE DISEASES

April 21, 2008 (OTTAWA, ON) – Canada's national immunization coverage rates are too low, leaving children under the age of two vulnerable to vaccine-preventable diseases such as measles, mumps and whooping cough (pertussis).

"It is critically important that parents make sure their children receive all doses of the recommended vaccines. Otherwise they are at risk of some very serious diseases," urged Dr. Bonnie Henry, Chair of the Canadian Coalition for Immunization Awareness & Promotion. "Infants are particularly vulnerable to many diseases that vaccines prevent since they have not yet developed immunity to the many bacteria and viruses that cause them. Immunization triggers their immune systems to be prepared to protect them from these serious diseases."

Recent outbreaks of mumps and measles in Canada are a reminder that immunization coverage rates are not yet high enough to control these diseases. To adequately prevent and control vaccine-preventable diseases, immunization coverage rates should generally be well over 90%:

- A recent Government of Canada report¹ set the 2010 target immunization coverage rate for two-year-olds at:
 - 95% for pertussis (whooping cough);
 - 85% for varicella (chicken pox);
 - 97% for rubella (German measles);
 - 90% for pneumococcal conjugate; and
 - 97% meningococcal C conjugate vaccines.
- The World Health Organization states that all countries should achieve a 90% national immunization coverage rate by 2010.²

Yet, a sampling of results from the National Immunization Coverage Survey³ show coverage rates for two-year-olds who have received all the recommended vaccine doses at only:

- 74% for pertussis (whooping cough);
- 61% for diphtheria, tetanus, polio, Hib, measles, mumps, and rubella.

"Achieving target immunization rates benefits both individuals and communities. As more individuals are protected, the more we reduce the health and economic costs of disease in Canada," confirmed Dr. Susan Bowles, Vice Chair of the Canadian Coalition for Immunization Awareness & Promotion.

Canadian parents are urged to talk to their doctor, nurse, pharmacist or local public health office about ensuring their children are fully immunized and protected.

NOTE: Local immunization coverage rates vary across Canada. For local information about immunization recommendations and coverage rates, please contact your local public health office.

For national information contact:

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About the Canadian Coalition for Immunization Awareness & Promotion

The Canadian Coalition for Immunization Awareness & Promotion is a coalition of 28 national organizations. Its mission is to contribute to the control, elimination, and eradication of vaccine-preventable diseases in Canada by increasing awareness of the benefits and risks of immunization for all ages via education, promotion, advocacy and media relations.

National Immunization Awareness Week

National Immunization Awareness Week, April 20-26, 2008, reminds us of the importance of immunization to preserve the good health of our children, families and communities. Look for special events in your area, organized by your local public health office, clinic, hospital, pharmacy or workplace. Immunization experts will be available in all parts of Canada to comment on our most effective tool to prevent disease – vaccines!

National Immunization Awareness Week in Canada coincides with Vaccination Week in the Americas organized by the Pan American Health Organization www.paho.org and European Immunization Week http://www.euro.who.int/Slovenia/20080325_1

Links

1. Final Report of Outcomes from the *National Consensus Conference for Vaccine-Preventable Diseases in Canada*, published by the Public Health Agency of Canada <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/ccdr-rmtc/08vol34/34s2/index-eng.php>
2. *Global Immunization Vision and Strategy 2006-2015*, published by the World Health Organization <http://www.who.int/immunization/givs/en/index.html>
3. Canadian National Report on Immunization 2006 http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/ccdr-rmtc/06vol32/32s3/2vaccine_e.html