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NEWS RELEASE

IMMUNIZATION SAVES LIVES

April 19, 2010 (OTTAWA, ON) –

Immunization saves lives. A century ago, because of infectious disease, too many children never saw their fifth birthday. Today, almost all the same diseases exist, but we are protected by immunization.

National Immunization Awareness Week in Canada is April 24 to May 1, 2010. Everyone – not just parents of small children – is encouraged to learn more about how to protect themselves against vaccine-preventable disease.

The *Canadian Immunization Guide* recommends immunization beginning at 2 months of age and continuing through all stages of life. "Following a standard schedule ensures that the maximal achievable protection is achieved." (*CIG*, p. 93)

"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," says Dr. Bonnie Henry, Chair of the Canadian Coalition for Immunization Awareness & Promotion (CCIAP). "Infants are particularly vulnerable to many diseases that vaccines prevent since they have not yet developed immunity to the bacteria and viruses that cause them. Immunization triggers their immune systems to be prepared to protect them from these serious diseases."

Recent outbreaks of measles in Canada emphasized the importance of immunization.

Although receiving immunizations during childhood is critical, some vaccines will not provide lifelong immunity against some diseases such as tetanus (lockjaw). Helper, or booster, shots are required to maintain immunity. A tetanus booster dose is recommended every ten years.

"Adults who were not adequately immunized as children may be at risk of infection from other vaccine-preventable diseases," says Dr. Susan Bowles, Vice Chair of the CCIAP. "Not only are under-immunized adults at risk of contracting diseases themselves – they can also infect others. For example, adults who contract measles, mumps or pertussis (whooping cough) can infect infants who may not yet be fully immunized. These are two good reasons for continuing to ensure your immunization record is up to date."

Immunization saves lives. Protect yourself, your family and your community.

Backgrounder

Canada's national immunization coverage rates are not optimal, leaving those who are not immunized vulnerable to vaccine-preventable diseases such as measles, mumps and whooping cough (pertussis). Canadian parents are urged to talk to their doctor, nurse, pharmacist or local public health office about ensuring that they and their children are fully immunized and protected.

To prevent and control vaccine-preventable diseases, immunization coverage rates should generally be well over 90%. The World Health Organization states that all countries should achieve a 90% national immunization coverage rate by 2010.¹

A 2006 Government of Canada report² set the 2010 target immunization coverage rate for two-year-olds at:

- o 95% for pertussis (whooping cough);
- o 85% for varicella (chicken pox);
- o 97% for rubella (German measles);
- o 90% for pneumococcal conjugate; and
- o 97% meningococcal C conjugate vaccines.

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:

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

Immunization has saved more lives in Canada in the last 50 years than any other health intervention. Immunization is the single most cost-effective health investment, making it a cornerstone in the effort to promote health.

NOTE: Local immunization coverage rates vary across Canada. For local information about immunization recommendations and coverage rates, please contact your local public health office. Links to local public health offices are listed on CCIAP's web site <http://immunize.ca/en/publications-resources/links.aspx> .

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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 24-May 1, 2010, 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

http://new.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogcategory&id=1820&Itemid=1973, and with European Immunization Week <http://www.euro.who.int/eiw>.

References

1. *Global Immunization Vision and Strategy 2006-2015*, published by the World Health Organization <http://www.who.int/immunization/givs/en/index.html>
2. 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/O8vol34/34s2/index-eng.php>
3. Canadian National Report on Immunization 2006 http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/ccdr-rmtc/O6vol32/32s3/2vaccine_e.html