



Greene County Public Health

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Press Release

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August is National Immunization Awareness Month

GREENE COUNTY, OH – National Immunization Awareness Month provides us an opportunity to think about how far the development and advancement of immunization science has come, and its impact on public health. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) plays a key role in immunization by evaluating vaccines for safety and effectiveness before they are made available to the public.

Vaccines work by stimulating the body's immune system to safely provide protection against viruses or bacteria that cause infection. After vaccination, the immune system is prepared to respond quickly when the body encounters the disease-causing organism.

Why are vaccines important? They help provide protection from an infectious disease and can lessen the severity of illness. If you are immune to a disease, you can be exposed to it without becoming sick. Simply put, because of advances in medical science, vaccines can help protect us against more diseases than ever before. Some diseases that once injured or killed thousands of people have been eliminated primarily due to vaccines.

Robert M. Califf, M.D., FDA Commissioner of Food and Drugs, states, "I know all too well how important vaccinations are throughout life, helping people of all ages live longer, healthier lives. The World Health Organization estimates that immunization currently [prevents 3.5-5 million deaths](#) every year from diseases like diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, influenza and measles and tens of millions of people are alive today because of the COVID-19 vaccines".

Getting the right information about immunization in the digital age, however, can be like drinking from a fire hose. Most Americans are on the receiving end of a constant barrage of information coming at them through phones, laptops, TVs, and social media. Trying to filter fact from fiction can be a challenge, but oh so critical when it comes to public health.

When it comes to immunizations, it's important to remember three things.

1. FDA Authorizes or Approves Vaccines Based on Rigorous Evaluation and Analysis of Data

Vaccines to prevent infectious diseases are given to millions of babies, children, adolescents, and adults, so it is critical that they are demonstrated to be safe and effective. Vaccines undergo a rigorous FDA evaluation of

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laboratory and clinical data to ensure their safety, effectiveness, and manufacturing quality. The FDA's [Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research](#) (CBER) is responsible for regulating vaccines.

2. COVID-19, Flu and RSV Vaccines Save Lives

Specific to COVID-19 vaccines, CBER has been integral in overseeing the development of the vaccines to prevent COVID-19 and authorizing and approving the vaccines that are proven to meet criteria for safety and effectiveness. Working with manufacturers to get updated vaccines to the public as quickly as possible, while adhering to the FDA's rigorous scientific and regulatory evaluation process, has enabled one of the major achievements in the history of biomedical science. The FDA will only approve or authorize a vaccine for emergency use if it meets the agency's standards for safety, effectiveness, and manufacturing quality. We have a dedicated group of experienced scientific and medical professionals evaluating the available data to make sound, scientific decisions about these vaccines.

Staying up to date with COVID-19 vaccination is the best way to help protect against severe illness and hospitalization from COVID-19. Even fully vaccinated people may get infected. We know that the virus has a strong tendency to mutate so it can stay alive. On June 27, 2024, the CDC Director adopted the ACIP's (Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices) recommendations for use of 2024–2025 COVID-19 vaccines in people ages 6 months and older as approved or authorized by FDA. The 2024–2025 vaccines are expected to be available in fall 2024.

And it's not too soon to start thinking about influenza (flu) and RSV (respiratory syncytial virus) viruses which typically spread in fall and winter.

The flu is a contagious respiratory disease that is caused by influenza viruses which infect the respiratory tract (nose, throat, and lungs). The flu is different from a cold because the symptoms and complications can be more severe. The exact timing and duration of flu seasons varies, but flu activity often begins to increase in October. Most of the time flu activity peaks between December and February, although significant activity can last as late as May.

Respiratory syncytial (sin-SISH-uhl) virus, or RSV, is a common respiratory virus that infects the lungs, but can also affect the nose and throat. RSV spreads in the fall and winter along with other respiratory viruses, like flu and COVID-19. It usually peaks in December and January.

A lot of the illness and death caused by the influenza virus can be prevented by a yearly influenza vaccine. The CDC recommends that most individuals 6 months of age and older get the flu vaccine every year. It is especially important for people in high-risk groups.

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3. Be Smart When Considering Your Source of Information

Drinking from a fire hose is rarely a fruitful endeavor and a good filter can be helpful. A public health priority is to focus on countering the growing dissemination of misinformation and disinformation about science, medicine, and the FDA, which is putting patients and consumers at risk. Increasingly, people are being distracted and misled.

The constant stream of information, opinion and, too often, disinformation, has eroded trust in societal institutions, including the FDA – and, regrettably, in the science upon which our decisions are based. This is causing harm to patients and consumers. It is concerning to those in the medical and public health fields that people are choosing not to receive available vaccines and are falling behind on routine vaccinations.

The FDA is working to promote reliable information and discredit misinformation or disinformation that is intentionally designed to harm people. For accurate information about immunizations, look for information from U.S. government partners, such as the CDC and your local public health authority. It's ok to have questions about vaccines, so if you do, talk to a health care professional.

Vaccines have prevented countless cases of disease and disability and have saved millions of lives. We are so fortunate that today, because of safe and effective vaccines, few people experience the devastating effects of measles, pertussis, and other serious illnesses.

For you and every member of your family, it is important to stay up to date with vaccinations. **August is National Immunization Awareness Month**, now is a great time to get back on track with routine vaccinations.

For more information on Greene County Public Health, visit www.gcph.info or call 937-374-5600.

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