



Key Messages

- National Infant Immunization Week (NIIW) is an annual observance to highlight the importance of protecting infants from vaccine-preventable diseases and to celebrate the achievements of immunization programs in promoting healthy communities throughout the United States. This year, NIIW is scheduled to be held April 16-23, 2016.
- When the NIIW observance was established in 1994, immunization programs were facing significant challenges. The nation was in the midst of a serious measles outbreak and communities across the U.S. were seeing decreasing immunization rates among children.
- NIIW provided an opportunity to draw attention to these issues and to focus on solutions. Communities have continued to use the week each year to raise awareness about the importance of ensuring all children are fully protected from vaccine preventable diseases through immunization. Today, many immunization programs, partners and communities can celebrate high infant immunization rates.
- During the last week in April, hundreds of communities across the United States will join those in countries around the world to celebrate the critical role vaccination plays in protecting the health of our children, families, and communities. The United States celebrates NIIW as part of World Immunization Week, (April 24-30, 2016), an initiative of the World Health Organization.
- The Vaccines for Children (VFC) program provides vaccines to children who are underinsured or whose parents or guardians may not be able to afford them. The VFC program helps children get their vaccines according to the recommended immunization schedule and has contributed directly to a substantial increase in childhood immunization coverage levels, making a significant contribution to the elimination of disparities in vaccination coverage among young children.
- Vaccines are among the most successful and cost-effective public health tools available for preventing disease and death. They not only help protect vaccinated individuals, but also help protect entire communities by preventing and reducing the spread of infectious diseases. Among children born during 1994-2013, vaccination will prevent an estimated 322 million illnesses, 21 million hospitalizations, and 732,000 deaths over the course of their lifetimes.
- Immunization is a shared responsibility. Families, healthcare professionals, and public health officials must work together to help protect the entire community.
- Healthcare professionals remain parents' most trusted source of information about vaccines for their children. They play a critical role in supporting parents in understanding and choosing vaccinations.
- Most parents choose the safe, proven protection of vaccines. Giving babies the recommended immunizations by age two is the best way to protect them from 14 serious childhood diseases, like whooping cough and measles. Parents are encouraged to talk to their child's doctor to ensure that their baby is up-to-date on immunizations.
- Protecting babies from whooping cough begins before a baby is even born. All pregnant women are recommended to receive the whooping cough vaccine, or Tdap, during the third trimester of each pregnancy to



help protect their baby from whooping cough until he can receive his first whooping cough vaccine at 2 months. Learn more about the CDC's *Born With Protection* campaign at www.cdc.gov/pertussis/pregnant.

- Because of the success of vaccines in preventing disease, parents may not have heard of some of today's vaccines or the serious diseases they prevent. These diseases can be especially serious for infants and young children. That is why it is important to follow the recommended immunization schedule to protect infants and children by providing immunity early in life, before they are exposed to potentially life-threatening diseases. Vaccine-preventable diseases still circulate in the United States and around the world, so continued vaccination is necessary to protect everyone from potential outbreaks. Even when diseases are rare in the U.S., they can still be commonly transmitted in many parts of the world and brought into the country by unvaccinated individuals, putting unvaccinated people at risk.
- One example of the seriousness of vaccine-preventable diseases is the increase in measles cases and outbreaks that have been reported in recent years. The United States experienced a record number of measles cases during 2014, with 667 cases from 27 states. This is the greatest number of cases since measles elimination was documented in the U.S. in 2000. Most of these people got measles in the United States after being exposed to someone who got measles while in another country. So far in 2015, more than 180 people in the U.S. have been reported to have measles. Most of these cases were part of a large outbreak linked to an amusement park in California. For measles resources and information on vaccination recommendations, including for children traveling internationally, visit www.cdc.gov/measles.
- Currently, the United States has the safest, most effective vaccine supply in its history. The United States' long-standing vaccine safety system ensures that vaccines are as safe as possible. As new information and science become available, this system is, and will continue to be, updated and improved.