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Serious Childhood Illnesses Continue to Circulate:
World Immunization Week and National Infant Immunization Week
Highlight Importance of Vaccinations

Brewster, NY—Vaccination saves the lives of millions of children and adults. Described as one of the top ten achievements in 20th Century public health, routine infant immunization offers proven protection from 14 vaccine-preventable diseases. Unfortunately, these potentially life-threatening illnesses have yet to be eradicated. During April, National Infant Immunization Week (NIIW) is celebrated simultaneously with the global immunization observance, World Immunization Week, to highlight the continued importance of protecting all infants and children before age two.

Pertussis (whooping cough), diphtheria, measles, and other vaccine-preventable diseases continue to circulate in the United States and around the world. In 2012, Putnam County recorded 43 cases of whooping cough, a significant increase over the previous year. The highest rate was among children younger than age 1. Nationwide whooping cough led to 14 infants deaths last year.

“Pertussis vaccine cannot be given before 2 months of age,” explains Allen Beals, MD, Putnam County Commissioner of Health. “To protect these vulnerable infants, we use ‘cocoon vaccination,’ which immunizes all adults who may have lost their childhood immunity and come in contact with these susceptible children.”

Diphtheria, once a major cause of death and illness among children, resulted in 15,520 deaths in 1921. No cases were recorded in the U.S between 2004 and 2008, but the disease circulates globally.

Similarly, the measles virus has resulted in countless fatalities in the U.S. Approximately 12,000 deaths occurred here in 1916, and 75 percent were children younger than five years old. The incidence of measles dropped dramatically after the Measles, Mumps, Rubella (MMR) vaccine was licensed in 1981.

Eradication looked possible, but outbreaks still continue. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the number of measles cases and outbreaks spiked in 2011, with unvaccinated people making up the majority of those affected.

Though not a routine infant immunization, flu vaccine is also recommended for babies six months of age and older. During the current flu season, 126 pediatric flu-associated deaths have already been reported across the country. Early reports indicate that 90% of these deaths occurred in children who had not received a flu vaccination this season.

The Putnam County Department of Health offers routine infant immunizations as well as those for adults. To schedule an appointment at a clinic, or for further information, call the Putnam County Department of Health at 845-808-1332. The Health Department's mission is to improve and protect the health of the county's nearly 100,000 residents through prevention of illness and injury. Core services include community health assessment, disease surveillance and control, environmental health protection, family health promotion and health education. For more information, please visit our website at www.putnamcountyny.com or on Facebook at www.facebook.com/putnamhealth and Twitter @PutnamHealthNY.

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