IMMUNIZATIONS SAVE LIVES

Non-medical exemptions to immunizations can put entire communities at risk of dangerous, costly outbreaks

Vaccines are among the most effective means of preventing infectious diseases. Federal and professional guidelines recommend childhood, adolescent and adult immunizations to protect against a wide range of viral and bacterial infections whose consequences can include disease, permanent disabilities and death.

Public participation in immunization programs is critical to their effectiveness. “Herd immunity” depends on a high percentage of all people being vaccinated to prevent the spread of disease. This community-level immunity then helps protect individuals who cannot be immunized, such as newborns too young for certain vaccines or people with cancer or other conditions that weaken their immune systems.

Outbreaks of infectious diseases can have serious medical consequences. Rubella can cause stillbirth, miscarriage, or severe birth defects.1 Measles is so contagious that 90% of unprotected people exposed to the virus will get sick.2 Before widespread measles immunization, 3 to 4 million people got measles each year in the U.S. Pregnant women and infants and children under the age of five years are at high risk for severe illness and complications of measles.3

Infectious disease outbreaks are also costly. Public health officials may spend millions of dollars tracking down those exposed and offering immunizations. In 2011 alone, the public health cost of addressing dozens of measles outbreaks across the U.S. was estimated at $2.7 to $5.3 million.4

Non-Medical Exemptions to Immunization Should Be Eliminated

March of Dimes supports efforts to increase immunization coverage and eliminate non-medical exemptions so that children, pregnant women, and all Americans are protected from vaccine-preventable diseases. The health and wellbeing of all communities depends on the collective immunity provided by high immunization rates.