



The Maryland State Medical Society

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MARYLANDERS OF ALL AGES SHOULD TALK TO THEIR DOCTORS ABOUT GETTING VACCINATED

Op-ed In Center Maryland, by Gene M. Ransom, III

As we enter fall, parents around Maryland have sent their children into the school year with everything they need to succeed, including their required school vaccinations. But immunizations aren't just for our children – they are a lifelong, year-round medical necessity, and a critical public health tool for protecting against a broad range of dangerous and potentially deadly illnesses.

The practice of getting vaccinated should and does start at an early age. MedChi plays an official role in the review and release of the official Maryland Department of Health Child immunization schedule. That schedule is approved and has been released on the [Department of Health](#) and [MedChi website](#).

The classroom environment makes Maryland students and their classmates susceptible to contracting and spreading a range of dangerous illnesses. In school communities, vaccines play an important role in creating “herd immunity” – when a high enough percentage of people are vaccinated so the entire community can be protected from disease, including those who aren't medically able to be immunized.

In Maryland alone, thousands of kids go unvaccinated every year, putting themselves and their classmates at risk. Maryland knows firsthand the effects of children not having proper vaccinations: in 2015, the Anne Arundel health department had to [notify](#) residents of an increase in whooping cough in school-age children.

And it is not only young children who should be vaccinated at the start of the school year. As Maryland teenagers and young adults prepare to return to college – and as students from all over the country return to Maryland colleges and universities – parents should make sure their children have a conversation with their healthcare provider about how to be protected from diseases such as meningitis. Unfortunately, incidents of meningitis have become all too common on America's college campuses, including locally. Maryland saw [twenty](#) cases of viral meningitis reported at the University of Maryland in the fall of 2014.

Meningitis, whether viral or bacterial, can spread quickly in close quarters, like college dorms. The bacterial form of the disease is particularly dangerous and although fast treatment has proven to save the lives of many individuals, the CDC [estimates](#) the fatality rate is between 10 and 15 percent. In addition, 19 percent of survivors suffer permanent complications, such as loss of limbs, injury to the nervous system, deafness, or brain damage.

Thankfully, there are now vaccines available to protect against all types of meningococcal disease that are most common in the United States. The best way to stop the spread of meningitis is by preventing it in the first place, which is why it is so important to make sure our college students are up-to-date with their vaccines.

Although often overlooked, vaccines are a critical part of prenatal care: before a baby even takes a breath they should be protected from disease. It is essential for pregnant women to get vaccinated to protect their babies from diseases such as whooping cough or the flu, which are particularly common among newborns and can be deadly.

Finally, there are a broad range of vaccine-preventable diseases that threaten adults. Pneumococcal disease, which can lead to serious illnesses like pneumonia, blood infection, or bacterial meningitis, causes approximately 22,000 deaths every year. Adults living with chronic conditions such as heart disease, liver disease, asthma and other lung disease, as well as adults making certain lifestyle choices, such as smoking, should be vaccinated against pneumococcal disease.

The back to school season is not only an opportunity to get our kids the shots they need to return to school – it is also an ideal time to help protect the entire community through vaccinations. I encourage you to have a conversation with your doctor about the most appropriate vaccine schedule for you and your family.

About MedChi

MedChi, The Maryland State Medical Society, is a non-profit membership association of Maryland physicians. Formed in 1799, it is still the largest physician organization in Maryland today. The mission of MedChi is to serve as Maryland's foremost advocate and resource for physicians, their patients and the public health of Maryland. For more information, please visit www.medchi.org.

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