

# **Back to School with Good Health Habits ... Hints and Tips from your Allegan County Health Department!**

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As children are gearing up to go back to school, the Allegan County Health Department is here to update immunization records, provide hearing & vision tests, and refer clients for yearly physicals.

Parents should remember that school physicals are very important. All students should have yearly physicals to update immunizations, receive proper screenings, and identify hidden health problems. Students who play sports should receive a thorough exam to make sure their child is physically fit to engage in sports. Parents can use these visits as an opportunity to educate themselves about every stage of their child's growing years.

As school-aged children enter the preteen years, vaccinations are available to protect against whooping cough, meningococcal infections, and chicken pox. Whooping cough (or pertussis), is one of the most common respiratory diseases in American teens. Cases of this disease are on the rise in the U.S., with more than 25,000 cases in 2005. Meningococcal infections can be very serious, and can lead to meningitis, possibly death. However, all of these diseases can be easily prevented with a trip to your local health department or local physician.

Sickness can be spread easily in the school environment. If your child becomes sick, make sure they stay home to protect other students and faculty. Students should wash their hands with soap for at least 30 seconds before rinsing, and also carry hand sanitizer in their backpacks to guard against colds and gastrointestinal illnesses.

Other screenings provided by the Health Department include hearing and vision tests. Vision screening is required for kindergarten entry. We offer vision screenings for: 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> grades, or drivers education. Kindergarten, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> grade students receive hearing screenings.

Finally, it's important to send your child out the door with a nutritious breakfast and a healthy lunch. Eating properly not only curbs eating behavior that leads to obesity, but helps children stay focused and alert throughout the day.

"These are simple preventive measures that parents can take to ensure their children are safe and healthy when they are away from home," says Rashmi Travis.

For more information on prepping for school, immunization clinic times, and hearing and vision testing review the attached chart and/or call 269-673-5411 or visit our website at [www.allegancounty.org](http://www.allegancounty.org).

**RECOMMENDED VACCINES FOR PRE-TEENS**

<b>DISEASE</b>	<b>WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW</b>
<b>MENINGITIS</b>	Affects the brain and spinal cord. Spread through sneezing, coughing, kissing, and sharing food or drinks with an infected person. Places where teens are in close contact, such as classrooms or college dorms, make it easier to spread. Children need one shot at the 11-12 year old check-up.
<b>HUMAN PAPILLOMAVIRUS (HPV)</b>	HPV is a common virus. Can cause genital warts and cervical cancer. Three shots of HPV vaccine recommended for girls 11 years of age and older.
<b>TETANUS</b>	Tetanus is usually found in soil and enters through a cut or wound. Causes painful tightening of the muscles and is life threatening.
<b>DIPHTHERIA</b>	Spread by coughing or sneezing Can make you unable to breathe or move body parts.
<b>PERTUSSIS (WHOOPIING COUGH)</b>	Spread by coughing, sneezing or close contact with an infected person. Causes coughing and choking making it hard to eat or breath. If it is passed onto infants, may be life-threatening. One vaccine (Tdap) protects against these three diseases. Children should be immunized at the 11-12 year old check-up.
<b>INFLUENZA (FLU)</b>	Causes fever, headache, tiredness, cough, runny or stuffy nose, and sore muscles. Easily spread in places like classrooms, school activities, and dorms. All children 6 months through 18 years of age, and anyone else who wants to be protected, should receive flu vaccine every year.
<b>HEPATITIS A</b>	Can cause fever, tiredness, loss of appetite, nausea, and jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes). Need two shots of Hepatitis A vaccine.
<b>HEPATITIS B</b>	Can cause different kinds of liver disease including cancer. Children need three shots of Hepatitis B vaccine.
<b>VARICELLA (CHICKENPOX)</b>	Causes an itchy rash all over your body; fever and tiredness. Can lead to severe skin infections, scars and pneumonia. All school-age children and teens, who have not had chickenpox, now need two shots of vaccine.

Source: Protect Pre-teens & Teens from Serious Diseases: Michigan Department of Community Health May 2008