

# Healthy Habits

August 2007

Tips for reaching and maintaining your optimum state of health

## August is National Immunization Awareness Month

August is the time when parents are enrolling children in school, older students are entering college and adults, along with the health care community, are preparing for the upcoming flu season. This makes August the perfect time to focus on the value of immunization.

### How do vaccines work?

Vaccines have been used since the 1700's and are recognized as among the safest and most effective means of preventing life-threatening infections. Vaccines work by telling the person's immune system to prepare itself for possible exposure to disease-causing viruses or bacteria by creating antibodies and memory cells. When a person is actually exposed to the actual disease, the body knows exactly what to do to fight it off. This not only protects the immunized person, but it often limits the bug's ability to pass from person-to-person. Thus, people who cannot be immunized because of underlying medical conditions or who fail to respond to immunization may still be protected by virtue of what is referred to as community or herd immunity. Antibodies and "memory cells" then stay on guard in the body for years after the vaccination to safeguard it from the real disease germs.

### Are vaccines still necessary?

Before the vaccines we have today became available, diseases such as influenza, hepatitis, polio; even chickenpox and measles killed or disabled *millions*. While severe outbreaks of these diseases seems unlikely now, it is only through diligence in keeping our communities immunized that keeps such a grim reality from occurring again. Tens of thousands of deaths each year in the United States are prevented by immunizations and it is ALWAYS easier to prevent a disease than to treat one. With so many of us going to school together, working together, utilizing



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**SAVE LIVES--IMMUNIZE.**

mass transit and sharing the same space, the need for immunizations is not only necessary, it's greater than ever.

### Get on track!

Immunization schedules for infants through adults can be found at [www.optimahealth.com](http://www.optimahealth.com) and valuable information is located on websites such as the websites for the National Immunization Program [www.cdc.gov/nip](http://www.cdc.gov/nip) or National Partnership for Immunization, [www.partnersforimmunization.org](http://www.partnersforimmunization.org). The best thing to do is to know your immunization record and establish a relationship with a health-care provider to manage your care. A doctor can advise and remind you and your family about immunizations to keep you on track as the years go by. They can even get you back on track if you've missed a shot or two. Just remember that it takes a community effort to stay immunized and protect yourself and one another. We are all tasked with the responsibility of keeping vaccine-preventable diseases from threatening ourselves and those around us. It is up to you to do your part.

*The material contained in Healthy Habits is not intended to be medical advice on any particular matter. Readers should seek appropriate professional advice before acting on the basis of any information contained in this publication. This information is provided courtesy of Optima Health.*