



AMMI Canada Position Statement on the Importance of Immunization

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The resurgence of vaccine-preventable diseases and recent outbreaks of measles remind us of the vital importance of immunization. Vaccination with the right number of doses, administered at the right time to the right person is the cornerstone of a successful immunization program. This is especially important given the growing number of Canadians who suffer from chronic illnesses – some of which can lead to immunosuppression, either because of the disease itself or due to treatments administered. For this reason, it becomes even more important to maintain a high level of population immunity to protect the most vulnerable in our communities. AMMI Canada members involved in the prevention, treatment and diagnosis of infectious diseases, have identified immunization as a vital undertaking and responsibility for patient health and safety.

AMMI Canada recognizes the societal importance and health benefits of immunization and promotes the administration of vaccines, according to recommended schedules. The benefits of vaccines are clear. Surveillance data show a precipitous decline – even complete elimination – of many infectious diseases and related deaths since the introduction of vaccines. There were over 5,000 cases of poliomyelitis per year in Canada in the early 1950's. Vaccination against polio was introduced in 1955 and led to the elimination of poliomyelitis in Canada. The same has been shown for immunization against *Haemophilus influenzae* type b, which is an important cause of bacterial meningitis in young infants; the annual incidence dropped from 30.1 per 100,000 person-years (over 600 cases) to 0.49 (18 cases) after the vaccine was introduced in 1986. Furthermore, we know that highly contagious diseases, such as measles and pertussis (whooping cough), will cause outbreaks if population immunity falls even slightly, as seen during the recent measles outbreaks in the US and Canada. It is crucial to follow recommended immunization schedules to prevent the accumulation of susceptible and vulnerable individuals that could serve as reservoirs for an outbreak if an imported case of an infectious disease was to arrive on our shores.

Although immunization of infants, children and travelers is forefront in the public's eye, immunization of adults should not be overlooked. Adults may serve as a source of disease transmission. Pertussis in an adult may be mild and is often undiagnosed. However, transmission to infants who are not yet fully immunized and protected may lead to severe disease and death. This underscores the importance of the adult booster dose of pertussis vaccine. Adult immunization not only benefits the community, but is also important for protecting the individual from complications of diseases such as influenza, pneumonia and shingles that can be particularly severe in older adults and those who may be immunosuppressed. Each encounter with a patient should serve as an opportunity to review immunizations and to allow for catch-up of vaccines that may have been missed. Physicians should be aware of important vaccine opportunities with patients outside the annual examination of patients. The post-partum visit is another example of a vital opportunity to administer measles-mumps-rubella or varicella vaccines, if needed. Encounters at clinic visits or in the emergency department – for wound management as an example – should be an opportunity to review the need for the adult tetanus pertussis (dTaP) booster.

Lastly, it cannot be stated often enough that vaccines are safe. For vaccines to be approved for use in Canada, extensive testing to prove efficacy, immunogenicity and safety are conducted, presented and reviewed by Health Canada. Once approved for use, provincial and national surveillance systems for adverse events following immunization are in place to capture possible safety issues that, in turn, trigger investigations and causality assessment as needed. Healthcare providers have the responsibility of reporting possible adverse events following immunization to their jurisdiction to ensure confidence in vaccine safety.

AMMI Canada's position on the importance of immunization is consistent with that of the Public Health Agency of Canada and its National Advisory Committee on Immunization, Immunize Canada and the World Health Organization, among others.

AMMI Canada supports and promotes immunization for all Canadians, according to recommended schedules.

References

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