Stats4Vax Talk Track for School Nurses

There are several health issues that teens face today, so it can be difficult to prioritize what to discuss with them during office visits or consultations. There is one topic that can be, and should be, part of every conversation—vaccination.

As you know, too many teens are under-vaccinated against serious infectious diseases like meningococcal meningitis and human papillomavirus (HPV).[1,2] School nurses play an instrumental role in reminding teens and their parents/guardians the importance of immunization to help keep them healthy.

This document provides suggested guidance on how to talk to teens—specifically those 16-17 years old—about vaccination, and encourage them to talk to their healthcare provider to see that they are up-to-date on their immunizations.

Tips to Help Build Vaccination into Your Discussion w/ Teens

Any visit is a good opportunity for you to remind 16- and 17-year-olds about the importance of vaccination. Just a two-minute conversation can encourage them to talk to their parent/guardians, which can result in a visit to their healthcare provider.

Here are some questions to help kick-start the conversation:

- Have you received any vaccinations in the past couple of years? Do you know which ones?
- Do you know which vaccines you should have received as an adolescent?
- Do you know what vaccines do and why they are important?
- Do you know if you have any upcoming doctor's appointments?

National vaccination rates tell us that most teens have not received all four Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)-recommended immunizations,[1,2] so use this as an opportunity to educate those who are unaware or misinformed about what teens and parents/guardians need to know.

- The CDC recommends that teens receive four vaccines to help protect them against serious infectious diseases that could potentially lead to negative health effects or even death.[3]
- These four vaccines are:
    - Meningococcal vaccine
        - Meningococcal meningitis is a rare but serious disease that develops rapidly and can claim a life in as little as one day.[4] Of those who survive, approximately one in five are left with serious medical problems like amputation, deafness, and brain damage.[5] Teens are at increased risk of meningitis. This risk may be due to activities like sharing utensils and kissing.[6,7]
    - Human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine
        - HPV can cause various cancers in both boys and girls.[8]
    - Tdap vaccine
        - Tetanus causes painful tightening of the muscles usually all over your body; diphtheria causes a thick covering in the back of the throat and can lead to breathing problems, paralysis, heart

failure and even death; and pertussis causes coughing spells and can lead to pneumonia, seizures, brain damage, and death, particularly in infants.[9,10]

- Flu vaccine
  - Flu can lead to fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, fatigue and more. Serious outcomes include hospitalization and even death.[11]

- Vaccination is key to helping protect you against these very serious infectious diseases.
- Will you talk to your parents/guardians to see if you are up-to-date on your immunizations? And if you're not, will you encourage them to make a doctor's appointment?

Myths about vaccines continue to spread, resulting in misinformed concern about safety and side effects. Some of your students may ask questions regarding some of the things they've heard, so the below can help address any inquiries you receive from both teens and parents/guardians:

1. **I hear that vaccines cause autism. Is that true?**
   Vaccines do not cause autism.[12] This debate started when a study—which has since been retracted—linked autism to the Measles, Mumps, Rubella vaccine. Following publication, an independent panel reviewed the study and found it was flawed. In fact, the panel said the author of the study conducted it in a way that was "dishonest, irresponsible and misleading."[13] In addition, there have been multiple studies that have shown no link between vaccination and autism.[12] I encourage you to talk to your healthcare provider, who can speak more about the safety of vaccines.

2. **Vaccines have negative side effects.**
   Vaccines are very safe. Most vaccine side effects are usually minor and temporary, such as soreness at the site of injection or mild fever. The CDC, World Health Organization (WHO) and other health organizations all agree that vaccines are the best defense we have against serious, preventable, and sometimes deadly diseases.[14,15]

3. **Can someone actually get the disease from a vaccine?**
   Almost never. The CDC says that with an inactivated vaccine, it isn't possible. Dead viruses or bacteria can't cause disease. And with live vaccines, such as those that help protect against measles and chickenpox, it sometimes can seem like a mild case of disease is appearing, but this is actually showing that the vaccine is working.[16]

4. **Vaccines are not necessary, particularly if you maintain good hygiene.**
   If people are not vaccinated, diseases that have become uncommon such as polio and measles can quickly re-appear in a community. Yes, good hygiene is important and can help protect people from infectious diseases, but many infections can spread regardless of how clean we are.[17]

Close your two-minute conversation with a handout that captures everything you just discussed. The "Letter Home to Parents/Guardians," also available in the Stats4Vax Resource Library, serves as a nice takeaway to remind teens to talk to their parents/guardians when they get home.

- Bring this letter home to your parent/guardian—it provides all the information we just went over.

- And for more information, tell your parent/guardian to visit the CDC's website, which has a whole section dedicated to teen vaccination at http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/who/teens/index.html.

References

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2015). National, Regional, State, and Selected Local Area Vaccination Coverage Among Adolescents Aged 13–17 Years — United States, 2014. Retrieved from http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6429a3.htm.
2. United States Census Bureau. (2013). Age and Sex Composition in the United States. Retrieved, from http://www.census.gov/population/age/data/2012comp.html.
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2016). Vaccines for Your Children: Protect Your Child at Every Age – 13 to 18 Years. Retrieved from http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents/protecting-children/years-13-18.html.
4. World Health Organization. (2015, February). Meningococcal Meningitis. Retrieved from http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs141/en/.
5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2013, March 22). Prevention and Control of Meningococcal Disease – Recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR). Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr6202a1.htm.
6. Stephens, D.S.; Greenwood, B.; Brandtzaeg, P. (2007). Epidemic Meningitis, Meningococcaemia, and Neisseria Meningitis. Lancet. 369 (9580), 2199.
7. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2012, March 15). Meningococcal Disease. About: Causes and Transmission. Retrieved from http://www.cdc.gov/meningococcal/about/causes-transmission.html.
8. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2015, September 30). Human Papilloma Virus (HPV): The Link Between HPV and Cancer. Retrieved from https://www.cdc.gov/hpv/parents/cancer.html.
9. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2015, February 24). Tdap Vaccine: What You Need to Know. Retrieved from http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/vis/vis-statements/tdap.pdf.
10. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2015, September). Pertussis (Whooping Cough): Clinical Complications. Retrieved from http://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/clinical/complications.html.
11. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2016, May 4). Influenza (Flu): Seasonal Influenza: Flu Basics. Retrieved from http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/disease/index.htm.
12. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2015, November 23). Vaccines Do Not Cause Autism. Retrieved from http://www.cdc.gov/vaccinesafety/concerns/autism.html.
13. AAFP News Now. (2010, February 10). Journal Retracts Controversial Study Linking MMR Vaccine, Autism. Retrieved from http://www.aafp.org/news/clinical-care-research/20100210lancet-retracts.html.
14. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Vaccines and Immunizations: Why Immunize? (2014, September 23). Retrieved from http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vac-gen/why.htm.
15. World Health Organization. (2016). Health Topics: Immunization. Retrieved from http://www.who.int/topics/immunization/en/.
16. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Parents' Guide to Childhood Immunizations. Retrieved from http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents/tools/parents-guide/parents-guide-part4.html.
17. World Health Organization. (2016, March). What Are Some of the Risks – and Facts – About Vaccination? Retrieved from http://www.who.int/features/qa/84/en/.