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## Boost Your Power – Get Immunized!

You don't have to be a superhero to have the power to protect your community from harm. Making sure your immunizations are up to date helps protect you, your family and your community from serious vaccine preventable diseases like measles, mumps and whooping cough.

"We're fortunate in B.C. to have a comprehensive immunization program for children," said Health Minister Terry Lake. "These vaccines are free and easily available through public health clinics, doctors' offices and school-based programs. By taking advantage of this program, parents are not only protecting their own children but others in the community as well."

Measles outbreaks this year in Disneyland and Ontario and last year's large outbreak of 400 cases in the Fraser region of our province are reminders of why immunization is important.

The more people who are immunized, the greater the protection for those who can't be immunized or have weakened immune systems like babies or people with certain health conditions.

"An immunization rate of at least 90 per cent helps protect vulnerable people in the community. When the majority of people are vaccinated for a disease, it becomes harder for the disease to spread from person to person, says Dr. Althea Hayden, Public Health Physician with Interior Health. "When immunization rates drop, diseases come back. This puts our most vulnerable citizens at risk."

In the Interior Health region, 71 per cent of children have completed their recommended immunizations by two years of age. This number has remained relatively stable over the last few years. The provincial rate is 68 per cent.

Ironically, one of the challenges in increasing immunization rates may be the success of immunization programs themselves.

"Many of today's parents have not seen vaccine preventable diseases in their lifetimes; thanks to very successful immunization programs, so they don't realize how dangerous these diseases can be," said Dr. Hayden. "Measles and chickenpox viruses can lead to serious complications like pneumonia and encephalitis (brain swelling). Pertussis (whooping cough) can cause seizures and brain damage in babies and mumps infection can result in deafness."

In the last 50 years, immunization has saved more lives in Canada than any other health intervention. April 25 to May 2 is National Immunization Awareness Week. This year's theme, "Boost Your Power – Get Immunized" is an important reminder that immunization is the best way to protect yourself, your family and your community from many serious diseases.

For more information:

- Call your local public health centre. To find a health centre near you, use our online search tool [http://www.interiorhealth.ca/FindUs/\\_layouts/FindUs/By.aspx?type=Location](http://www.interiorhealth.ca/FindUs/_layouts/FindUs/By.aspx?type=Location). Health centres are also listed under Health Authorities in the blue pages of your telephone directory.
- Check the Interior Health website at: <http://www.interiorhealth.ca/YourHealth/Immunization/Pages/default.aspx>.
- Visit ImmunizeBC's website at: <http://immunizebc.ca>.