



FORMER FIRST LADIES AND ADVOCACY GROUPS CALL FOR ENDING THE NEGLECT OF 20% OF PRESCHOOLERS WITHOUT NEEDED VACCINES, AS NATIONAL IMMUNIZATION MONTH CONCLUDES

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WASHINGTON, DC, AUGUST 24, 2004 – As National Immunization Month concludes, Former First Lady of the United States Rosalynn Carter and Former First Lady of Arkansas Betty Bumpers, cofounders of Every Child By Two joined with Trust for America's Health (TFAH) to call for re-energizing efforts to immunize the 20 percent of preschoolers who persistently remain unvaccinated in the U.S.

“There are actual, achievable measures that could be taken immediately to improve preschooler immunization rates in the U.S.,” said Rosalynn Carter, President of Every Child By Two. “Preschoolers are particularly vulnerable to a host of childhood illnesses. No child in America should have to get sick from a vaccine preventable disease. It’s time for us to redouble efforts to protect the 20 percent of preschoolers who are routinely not being immunized on time.”

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced an all-time high immunization rate for infants and toddlers in the U.S. earlier this month. However, at least 20 percent of preschoolers have gone unvaccinated every year for the past three decades, leaving 2.1 million children at increased risk of preventable diseases.

TFAH and Every Child By Two today released a new report “Closing the Vaccination Gap: A Shot in the Arm for Childhood Immunization Programs,” which examined childhood immunization policy in the U.S., reasons for the persistent 20 percent gap of preschoolers who do not receive routine vaccines on time, and actions that have been identified to close this gap. The report recommendations include:

- **Bolstering America’s Immunization Registries.** Measures must be taken to encourage greater participation by health care providers, particularly private providers, in registries, which are a crucial source of information to ensure that a child’s immunizations are up-to-date and duplicative immunizations are avoided.
- **Expansion of the Vaccines for Children (VFC) Program.** Passage of the bi-partisan “Children’s Vaccine Access Act” in Congress would result in increased access to immunization for under-insured children and eliminate the price caps on a number of vaccines purchased by the federal government.
- **Institution of a Vaccine Insurance Mandate.** As recommended by the Institutes of Medicine, all health insurers, both public and private, should be required to cover all recommended childhood immunizations.

- **Increased Education and Awareness Measures.** Increased education, particularly by working more intensely with primary medical care providers and with low-income communities, would help eliminate misperceptions and lack of information about the benefits of vaccines.
- **Provision of Adequate Support to the CDC for the Purchase and Delivery of Vaccines.** TFAH and Every Child By Two support a FY 2005 appropriation for the CDC's National Immunization Program (NIP) of \$824 million. This is a \$180 million increase above current appropriations. The cost to fully immunize children continues to rise, due to the development of highly effective vaccines. Federal and state funding are not sufficient to purchase and deliver vaccines, leaving many children unprotected. CDC estimates that every dollar spent on immunization saves \$6.30 in direct medical costs and \$18.40 in indirect costs, producing an aggregate savings of \$42 billion annually.

“Neglecting to vaccinate 2.1 million preschool kids on time each year is simply unacceptable,” said Shelley A. Hearne, DrPH, Executive Director of TFAH. “This is not a lost cause. We could make real change, real fast by taking some real simple steps.”

Factors identified in the report as contributing to the 20 percent gap include:

- An under-funded and underutilized immunization registry system,
- Public misperceptions about the importance of vaccines and their safety, and
- Systemic issues, such as vaccine supply, distribution, and inadequate funding.

“The CDC’s announcement of the highest immunization rates for infants and toddlers is great news. The even better potential news is that we know what it would take to reach the last 20 percent of preschoolers,” said Betty Bumpers. “Hopefully, the latest progress will reinvigorate all of us to strive for full childhood vaccination rates in America.”

Carter and Bumpers have been credited with the passage of laws mandating vaccination at school entry, which now exist in every state. As a result of these laws, the U.S. has over a 95 percent immunization rate for school entrees.

Currently, the standard childhood immunization programs prevent approximately 10.5 million cases of infectious illnesses and 33,000 deaths each year. Addressing the 20 percent gap of under-vaccinated preschoolers will also greatly improve needed infrastructure to support the entire childhood vaccination program in America.

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Trust for America’s Health is a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to saving lives by protecting the health of every community and working to make disease prevention a national priority. www.healthyamericans.org

Every Child By Two is the Carter/Bumpers Campaign for Early Immunization. www.ecbt.org