

Communications Office

Peterborough County-City Health Unit
10 Hospital Drive
Peterborough, ON K9J 8M1
(705) 743-1000, ext. 391
www.pcchu.ca



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, March 10, 2011, Peterborough

Health Unit Concerned About Declining Student Vaccination Rates for HPV, Meningitis and Hepatitis B

Parents Encouraged to Protect Their Children This Spring With Safe, Free Vaccines

During last night's Board of Health meeting at the Peterborough County-City Health Unit, Medical Officer of Health Dr. Rosana Pellizzari expressed concern over declining vaccination rates of grade seven and eight students for three serious diseases.

"The low vaccination rates for HPV, meningitis and Hepatitis B mean that more of our youth could face serious health risks if they aren't protected," said Dr. Pellizzari. "We urge parents to get their children immunized as these are safe, effective vaccines that are available for free in schools to grade seven and eight students. Health Unit nurses will be in schools this spring so it's not too late to get students vaccinated."

Immunization rates declined among grade seven students from 2007/08 to 2010/11 from 71% to 66% for Hepatitis B (first dose) and from 78% to 65% for meningitis coverage. HPV vaccine uptake for grade eight girls remains low at only 58%. Dr. Pellizzari said ideally these rates should be more than 80% for good public protection.

"Hepatitis B and HPV are known carcinogens and highly infectious, so I can't stress enough how important it is to protect our young people before they become sexually active," said Dr. Pellizzari. "The incidence of meningococcal disease often peaks during adolescence and causes a serious infection of the lining of the brain that strikes quickly, making children extremely ill very fast. Many parents are having their one-year olds vaccinated but with more than one-third of our local students still not protected, I strongly encourage parents to get their school-aged children vaccinated."

Dr. Pellizzari also noted that parents who choose to get their daughters vaccinated with the HPV vaccine in grade eight for free will avoid the \$400 cost to get them immunized later in life.

Parents can find out when Health Unit nurses will be visiting their child's school and download consent forms for each vaccine from the Health Unit's website

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www.pcchu.ca. Health Unit nurses will have all three vaccines on hand when visiting schools in the spring and can immunize any student with signed consent forms. The Health Unit is also undertaking a number of activities to increase vaccination rates, such as holding more evening clinics at its Hospital Drive location and developing a social media campaign.

-30-

For further information, please contact:

Brittany Cadence
Communications Supervisor
(705) 743-1000, ext. 391