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**The Nurse Practitioner Healthcare Foundation (NPHF) Stresses Importance of Adolescent Immunization at a Time When Economic Challenges Make Regular Check-ups Difficult for Many***NPHF White Paper Addresses Adolescent Health, and Demonstrates that Immunization is Key to Disease Prevention for Individuals, Communities*

Bellevue, WA, (June 18, 2009) – Just over fifty years ago, the polio virus was a major public health issue in the U.S. and globally. Thanks to the discovery of a vaccine and effective immunizations policies, polio has now been eradicated from the U.S. and is close to being eradicated on a global scale. Another more recent success story lies in the Hepatitis B vaccine. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Hepatitis B immunization has decreased the number of new cases among 19 to 24-year-olds from 18.5 per 100,000 adolescents in 1997, to 5.4 per 100,000 adolescents in 2005. To place focus on immunization, specifically for adolescents, the NPHF created the Adolescent White Paper.

Authored on behalf of NPHF by Nancy Rudner Lugo, DrPH, NP, the white paper explains the importance of immunization, notes barriers to immunization and offers recommendations to achieve proper and timely vaccination for all adolescents.

“The healthcare community often places the most emphasis on immunizations for very young and very old patients,” says NPHF President, Phyllis Zimmer, MN, ARNP, FAAN. “We need to make immunization for adolescents a priority as well.”

As we approach 2010, the healthcare community has made progress, but has not yet achieved the *Healthy People 2010* objective – a national goal set 10 years ago to reach 90 percent vaccination coverage among 13-15-year-olds.

**Immunization Protects Individuals and Communities**

Immunization is a proven health promotion strategy against vaccine-preventable diseases (VPDs) for persons of all ages. When more people are immunized, a “herd community” effect is created – fewer people are susceptible to infection, and fewer people can contract the infection and infect others, creating a healthier community.

For infants and very young children, the immunization schedule has been a focal point for ongoing preventive visits. Unfortunately, the focus on immunizations seems to lose strength once a child reaches adolescence. Using data from the National Ambulatory Medical Care Survey and the National Hospital Ambulatory Medical Care Survey, investigators found that one-sixth to one-third of adolescents do not see a healthcare professional in a given year. In addition, low-income adolescents receive less primary care than more affluent adolescents, and only nine percent of visits for all adolescents are preventative.

The lack of proper and timely immunization concerns many within the healthcare community since consequences of not vaccinating can be devastating. For instance, the epidemiology of meningitis infections indicates highest prevalence among college freshman living in dormitories, with peak incidence at age 18. Furthermore, the fatality rate of meningococcal sepsis, which can develop from meningitis, is about 40 percent.

**Barriers to Immunization**

Major obstacles to proper and timely immunization include:

- Lack of access to education and services

- Lack of health insurance coverage
  - Practice barriers and missed opportunities
- more-

- Cultural and religious beliefs
- Need for parental consent

The NPHF believes the healthcare community can actively combat these obstacles to achieve the 2010 goal of 90 percent vaccination. For example, one obvious way to ensure immunization is to avoid missed opportunities, which occur when adolescents gain access to an aspect of care – such as a school physical, sports-related injury, acute illness or family planning – and do not receive immunizations.

### **Recommendations for Improvement**

Increased focus on adolescent immunization is necessary to ensure adequate protection. Concerted effort to immunize adolescents can ensure that these young people are protected against VPDs, and the success with infant and preschool immunizations can serve as a model. The NPHF recommendations to achieve 90 percent immunization among adolescents by 2010 include:

- Raise awareness of the need for adolescent immunizations among 11-12-year-olds and their parents or guardians
- Communicate with adolescents in their own environment and ensure that messages are clear
- Remove financial barriers
  - All insurance plans, regardless of the source of funding, should cover all recommended vaccinations without an out-of-pocket expense
- Leverage health plans to encourage immunizations
- Encourage local, state and national registries to include adolescent data
- Support multiple venues for immunization education and administration
- Clinicians should keep current on immunization information and ensure that colleagues are up-to-date as well
- Eliminate practice barriers to immunizations

*This white paper, “Adolescent Health: Immunizations Are Key to Prevention” was developed in the public interest by the Nurse Practitioner Healthcare Foundation through an educational grant from Sanofi Pasteur.*

*The full document may be viewed on the NPHF website: [nphealthcarefoundation.org](http://nphealthcarefoundation.org).*

### **The Nurse Practitioner Healthcare Foundation**

*In 2005, a group of pioneering nurse practitioners launched the Nurse Practitioner Healthcare Foundation. The foundation, dedicated to raising the bar in health care, works on behalf of the entire nurse practitioner profession to make high-quality, effective care accessible through research, education, health policy, service and philanthropy. The Nurse Practitioner Healthcare Foundation is an IRS 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that helps improve policy and decision-making through research and analysis. To obtain information or to order documents, contact NPHF by phone (425-861-0911), or go to the NPHF website: [nphealthcarefoundation.org](http://nphealthcarefoundation.org).*

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