

PRESS RELEASE
April 13, 2004

MASON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
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TO: KMAS, KRXY, SHELTON-MASON COUNTY JOURNAL, THE OLYMPIAN, SHELTON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, NORTH MASON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, CITY OF SHELTON, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL, THE SUN

RE: National Infant Immunization Week (NIIW)
April 24 - May 1, 2004

National Infant Immunization Week (NIIW) is an annual observance to promote the benefits of immunizations and to improve the health of children two years old and younger. The theme this year is **"Vaccination: An Act of Love." "Love Them, Protect Them, Immunize Them."**

Since 1994, NIIW has provided an excellent opportunity to highlight the positive impact of immunization on the lives of infants and children and to call attention to immunization. This year marks the 10th anniversary of NIIW and the fulfillment of a historic event. For the first time ever, childhood immunization and access to health services will be promoted concurrently in more than 35 countries in the Americas through the Pan American Health Organization's Vaccination Week in the Americas (VWA), April 24-30.

We can prevent more diseases than ever before, yet despite recent gains in childhood immunization coverage, over 1 million of our nation's two-year-olds are still missing one or more of the recommended immunizations. Each day 11,000 babies are born who will need to be immunized against twelve diseases before age two.

Vaccines are among the most successful and cost-effective public health tools available for preventing disease and death. A decision to vaccinate is a decision to protect not only an individual, but the entire community as well; a decision to not vaccinate is a decision to put the community at risk. When immunization programs achieve high levels of community immunity, the likelihood that an infected person will transmit the disease to a susceptible individual is greatly reduced. This creates indirect protection. Those indirectly protected are children who may be too young for vaccination, yet still susceptible to the disease, such as children under a year-old are too young to receive the measles vaccine. Also protected are children and adults who cannot be vaccinated for medical reasons, such as those with leukemia.

Parents and health care providers must work together to ensure that all children are fully immunized. We at the Mason County Department of Health Services, Immunization Program, have a vision of a world where every child has access to safe and effective vaccines. A world where no one should suffer or die from a disease easily prevented through vaccination. That world is possible if we work together to help immunization lead the way to healthy lives for our children.

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