

Most US babies get their vaccines, CDC says

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But booster shots and second doses lag for 2-year-olds, report finds.

(HealthDay)—The vast majority of American babies are getting the vaccines they need to protect them from serious illnesses, federal health officials said Thursday.

More than 90 percent of children are getting the vaccines that prevent [measles](#), mumps, and rubella (MMR); polio; hepatitis B and chickenpox (varicella), according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"Nationally, vaccination among children 19 to 35 months of age remains stable or has increased for all of the recommended vaccines, and that's really good news," said Dr. Melinda Wharton, acting director of CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases.

"There is still room for improvement," she added. "Coverage is not as high as we would like it to be for doses of vaccines and boosters given in the second year of life."

Wharton suggested one way to improve [vaccine](#) coverage could be with electronic medical records to help doctors keep track of when vaccinations are needed.

While some parents are reluctant to have their children vaccinated, or don't believe in vaccines at all, Wharton doesn't see this as a major problem. "The number of children who do not get any vaccine remains low and stable at less than 1 percent," she said.

Vaccines are essential in preventing sickness and death, the CDC said. "Among children born during 1994-2013, vaccination will prevent an estimated 322 million illnesses, 21 million hospitalizations and 732,000 deaths during their lifetimes," the CDC report stated.

The new findings were published in the Aug. 29 issue of the CDC's *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*.

The report also found that:

- the vaccination rate for rotavirus—which causes gastrointestinal problems such as diarrhea and vomiting—increased slightly from nearly 69 percent in 2012 to about 73 percent in 2013;
- the vaccination rate for one or more doses of the hepatitis A vaccine rose from just under 82 percent in 2012 to 83 percent in 2013. And the rate for hepatitis B vaccines rose from nearly 72 percent to 74 percent for the same time period.

While initial vaccination rates are high, getting second doses and booster shots that are needed when children are 2 years old remains a challenge, Wharton said.

These vaccines include the DTaP vaccine, which prevents diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis (whooping cough); Hib, which protects against

haemophilus influenzae type b, which can cause severe diseases like meningitis—an infection of the fluid and lining around the brain and spinal cord; and the PCV vaccine, which prevents pneumococcal disease, which can trigger ear infections and meningitis.

Poor children are less likely to get booster shots, and the full series of polio, rotavirus and hepatitis B vaccines, according to the report.

Wharton said most insurance plans cover vaccines. People who can't afford them can turn to the federal Vaccines for Children Program, which provides vaccines for free.

Vaccine coverage also varies by state and vaccine, the CDC report found.

When the researchers looked at immunizations against 11 different diseases—including chickenpox, measles and polio—coverage ranged from a high of 82 percent in Rhode Island to 57 percent in Arkansas. Also, 17 states had less than 90 percent coverage with the measles/mumps/rubella vaccine.

For one disease, measles, which has made a recurrence in the United States, national coverage with at least one dose of the measles/mumps/rubella vaccine was 92 percent. While this seems high, one in 12 children did not receive the first dose of the MMR vaccine on time, putting lots of kids at risk for measles, the CDC noted.

As of Aug. 22, there had been 592 measles cases reported in the United States this year, the most since 1994, according to the CDC.

Measles is most often introduced into the United States by unvaccinated Americans who travel overseas to areas where measles is endemic. Measles can spread quickly in communities with unvaccinated and under-

vaccinated people, the CDC pointed out.

Dr. Adriana Cadilla, a pediatrician at Miami Children's Hospital, said, "We still have a ways to go, but it's good to know that we're headed in the right direction" with childhood vaccinations.

Despite that progress, there are still some parents who oppose vaccinations, Cadilla said. "Those who are refusing are the ones that increase the risk to their communities," she said.

Since vaccines have made a lot of diseases rare, many parents don't have experience with how devastating they can be, she explained. "Vaccines are safe, and make sure your [children](#) are getting vaccinated," she added.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on [childhood vaccinations](#).

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