

HEALTH

Who's Footing the Bill for Your Child's Vaccinations?

NewsUSA

(NU) - In the past, almost every child suffered the uncomfortable and sometimes long-term effects of diseases such as mumps, which caused swelling of the face and even permanent conditions such as deafness. Today, however, children are breezing through their early years facing fewer diseases thanks to vaccinations, or immunizations.

"Childhood immunizations are among the greatest medical breakthroughs of the last century and are vital to growing up healthy," said Dr. Renee Jenkins of the American Academy of Pediatrics. "However, the system for delivering immunizations is broken, and we're going to be in real trouble if it's not fixed soon."

The price tags on both newer vaccines such as the HPV (human papilloma virus) vaccine, which protects against cervical cancer, and even routine vaccines such as the measles, mumps and rubella booster, are climbing. Additionally, insurance companies are providing lower reimbursements to doctors who provide vaccination services. The bottom line is that prevention in the form of vaccinations could go by the wayside – prevention that, according to the National Academy of Sciences' Institute of Medicine, saves \$10 in later health care costs for every \$1 spent on immunization.

And while it is usually consumers who foot higher price tags, in the case of vaccinations, it is pediatricians who are making up the difference. Approximately 85 percent of children in the United States are vaccinated in pediatricians' offices; however, as the financial burden increases, some pediatricians are becoming unable to offer the latest vaccinations – vaccinations



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that are necessary in the prevention of disease.

It is costly for pediatricians to purchase supplies of each vaccine. Additionally, pediatricians must pay to store, insure and administer these vaccines. Regardless, payers such as private insurance companies and Medicaid are reimbursing less and less – sometimes not even enough to cover the basic price of the vaccines.

"Pediatricians are not looking to make huge profits from vaccines," said Dr. Jon Almquist, chair of the American Academy of Pediatrics task force on immunizations. "We're in pediatrics because we care about the children, but we shouldn't be expected to subsidize the public health system and perform our jobs at a loss."

There are some things that parents, caregivers and employers can do. For example, parents can make sure their health insurance plans pay adequately for vaccines, and employers can talk to the private payers whose plans they offer to ensure that immunizations are fully covered.

For more information about immunizations, visit the American Academy of Pediatrics at www.aap.org.