Vaccinations Are Crucial To Protect Young Children

(StatePoint) Most parents know that one of the most important steps they can take to protect their children is to vaccinate them against dangerous diseases. But knowing what to vaccinate against and when to do so can be a complicated process.

National Infant Immunization Week, observed April 21-28, is a great reminder to get in touch with your pediatrician and ensure you are up-to-date with your child’s vaccinations.

“When children are not immunized, the results can be devastating,” says Dr. Robert W. Block, president of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). “Making sure your children are properly immunized will give them up to a 98 percent chance of avoiding many diseases.”

The AAP is offering these vital tips for parents to help sort out all the details:

• **Ask questions.** Remember, your pediatrician is ready and willing to partner with you on getting your children immunized. Use your child’s doctor as a resource to help you sort out the endless supply of information -- some good and some questionable -- on this topic. So prepare questions in advance, and take a note pad with you to your visit so you can jot down important advice and critical dates.

• **Be on time.** Your children’s immunization schedule is not an area of parenting where you should feel free to get creative. There are scientific reasons, based on knowledge of children’s immune systems, for why shots are recommended at certain ages. Updating your records and keeping a calendar can help you keep it all straight. More information on recommended schedules and on how immunizations work can be found at www.healthychildren.org.

• **Cocoon.** One of the best ways to protect very young children -- who have not yet received the full range of vaccines for deadly diseases -- is to ensure that all family members and caregivers who come in close contact with the child are up-to-date on their own immunizations. This protective measure is called “cocooning.”

• **Smile.** Most children won’t enjoy getting vaccinated. You can make the process smoother by staying calm yourself, as young children can pick up on your feelings. Remember to cuddle with your child before, during and after the vaccination. Bringing along a favorite stuffed animal or blanket is a great way to provide some much-needed comfort. If your child is experiencing pain, ask your doctor if a non-aspirin pain reliever is safe to administer.

Consider your child fortunate to grow up in the U.S., where he or she will have easy access to lifesaving vaccines. Not all children around the world are equally protected, however. Parents can join one of several global campaigns, such as Shot@Life, to support the health of children all over the world.

You have more control over your children’s wellness than you realize. If you’re unsure of whether your children’s vaccinations are up-to-date, do your little ones a favor and check with your pediatrician today.