Sample Key Messages

- National Infant Immunization Week (NIIW) is an annual observance to highlight the importance of protecting infants from vaccine-preventable diseases and to celebrate the achievements of immunization programs in promoting healthy communities throughout the United States. This year, NIIW will be April 27-May 4, 2019.

- In 2019, we are celebrating the 25th anniversary of NIIW. When the NIIW observance was established in 1994, immunization programs were facing significant challenges. The nation was in the midst of a serious measles outbreak and communities across the U.S. were seeing decreasing immunization rates among children.

- NIIW provided an opportunity to draw attention to these issues and to focus on solutions. Communities have continued to use the week each year to raise awareness about the importance of ensuring all children are fully protected from vaccine preventable diseases through vaccination. Today, many immunization programs, partners and communities can celebrate high infant vaccination rates.

- During the last week in April, hundreds of communities across the United States will join those in countries around the world to celebrate the critical role vaccination plays in protecting the health of our children, families, and communities. The United States celebrates NIIW as part of World Immunization Week, (April 24-30, 2019), an initiative of the World Health Organization.

- 2019 also marks the 25th anniversary of the Vaccines For Children (VFC) program. VFC is a federally funded program that provides vaccines at no cost to children who might not otherwise be vaccinated because of inability to pay. The VFC program helps children get their vaccines according to the recommended immunization schedule. It has helped increase childhood immunization coverage levels, making a significant contribution to the elimination of disparities in vaccination coverage among young children.

- Most parents choose the safe, proven protection of vaccines. Giving babies the recommended vaccinations by age two is the best way to protect them from 14 serious childhood diseases, like whooping cough and measles. Parents are encouraged to talk to their child’s doctor to ensure that their baby is up-to-date on vaccinations.
  - However, we are seeing an increase in the number of children under two years old who are receiving no vaccines. CDC’s data suggest that many of these parents do want to vaccinate their children, but they may not be able to get vaccines for them. They may face hurdles, like not having a healthcare professional nearby, not having time to get their children to a doctor, and/or thinking they cannot afford vaccines.
  - Families who need help paying for childhood vaccines should ask their healthcare professional about the VFC program. For help in finding a local healthcare professional who participates in the VFC program, parents can contact their state health department or visit https://www.cdc.gov/features/vfcprogram.
Vaccines are among the most successful and cost-effective public health tools available for preventing disease and death. They not only help protect vaccinated individuals, but also help protect entire communities by preventing and reducing the spread of infectious diseases. Among children born during 1994-2018, vaccination will prevent an estimated 419 million illnesses, 26.8 million hospitalizations, and 936,000 deaths over the course of their lifetimes.

Vaccination is a shared responsibility. Families, healthcare professionals, and public health officials must work together to help protect the entire community.

Healthcare professionals remain parents’ most trusted source of information about vaccines for their children. They play a critical role in supporting parents in understanding and choosing vaccinations.

Protecting babies from whooping cough begins before a baby is even born. All pregnant women are recommended to receive the whooping cough vaccine (Tdap) during each pregnancy. The recommended time to get the shot is during the 27th through 36th week of pregnancy, preferably during the earlier part of this time period. This will help protect babies from whooping cough until they can receive their first whooping cough vaccine at 2 months. Learn more about the CDC’s Born With Protection campaign at www.cdc.gov/pertussis/pregnant. Learn more about maternal vaccination at www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pregnancy.

Because of the success of vaccines in preventing disease, parents may not have heard of some of today’s vaccines or the serious diseases they prevent. These diseases can be especially serious for infants and young children. That is why it is important to follow the recommended immunization schedule to protect infants and children by providing immunity early in life, before they encounter potentially life-threatening diseases. Vaccine-preventable diseases still circulate in the United States and around the world, so continued vaccination is necessary to protect everyone from potential outbreaks. Even when diseases are rare in the U.S., they can still be common in many parts of the world and unvaccinated individuals can bring them to the U.S., putting unvaccinated people at risk.

Despite being eliminated in the US, public health officials still report measles cases and outbreaks to the CDC. For example, the United States has already experienced outbreaks of measles during 2019. For measles resources and information on vaccination recommendations, including for children traveling internationally, visit www.cdc.gov/measles.

- Measles is still commonly transmitted in many parts of the world. Worldwide, nearly 10 million people get measles and about 134,200 people, mostly children, die from the disease each year. Despite a national MMR vaccination coverage level of about 92%, one in 12 children in the U.S. is not receiving his first dose of MMR vaccine on time, underscoring considerable measles susceptibility across the country. Vaccination coverage continues to vary by state from 84% in some states to 97% in others. At the county or lower levels, vaccine coverage rates may vary considerably. Pockets of unvaccinated people can even exist in states with high vaccination coverage, underscoring considerable measles susceptibility at some local levels.

- When measles gets into communities of unvaccinated people in the U.S. (such as people who refuse vaccines for religious, philosophical or personal reasons), outbreaks are more likely to occur. These communities make it difficult to control the spread of the disease and make us vulnerable to having the virus re-establish itself in our country again.
• Currently, the United States has the safest vaccine supply in its history. The United States’ long-standing vaccine safety system ensures that vaccines are as safe as possible. As new information and science become available, vaccine recommendations are updated and improved.

• During NIW, communities across the 50 U.S. states, 8 U.S. Territories, and the District of Columbia celebrate the **CDC Childhood Immunization Champions**. The **CDC Childhood Immunization Champion Award** is an annual award given jointly by the CDC and the Association of Immunization Managers (AIM), who joins this year as a new partner on the award. The *Champions* award recognizes individuals who make a significant contribution toward improving public health through their work in childhood vaccination.

This document is found on the CDC website at: [www.cdc.gov/vaccines/events/niww/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/events/niww/index.html)