
NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Health Services

B.C. INCREASES FUNDING TO FIGHT CHILDHOOD DISEASES

VICTORIA – Government is investing an additional \$17 million per year in childhood immunization programs and other public health initiatives, Health Services Minister Colin Hansen announced today.

“We’re helping families fight infectious diseases before they even begin,” said Hansen. “Immunizations are the greatest gift we can give to our children to ensure they have the opportunity to grow up as healthy as possible.”

An investment of \$12.75 million per year will enhance the childhood immunization program, and \$4.25 million will be targeted to other public health areas that include disease prevention and food safety programs.

British Columbia’s provincial health officer Dr. Perry Kendall, chair of B.C.’s Communicable Disease Advisory Committee, has recommended that investments be made in the chicken pox, meningitis and influenza vaccination programs.

“Immunizations are among the most effective medical interventions we can provide,” said Kendall. “Vaccines are essential tools for public health control of many communicable diseases.”

The varicella (chicken pox) program will be expanded to include a universal 12-month old immunization and concurrent catch-up programs for pre-school children (kindergarten) and pre-teen children (grade 6). Currently, the immunization program targets high-risk people who are susceptible to severe chicken pox disease or its complications.

A meningococcal C vaccination program for grade 9 students will begin this school year and run for two years, to protect those children who did not receive the vaccination in grade 6. In 2006, a program for two and four-month old infants will replace the existing program that immunizes infants once at 12 months of age.

An influenza vaccination program for children six to 23 months old and household contacts of all infants aged 0-23 months will also be implemented this flu season.

An Immunization Committee headed by Dr. Kendall with representation from the BC Centre for Disease Control and each of the health authorities will be established to ensure the provincial childhood vaccine programs are implemented and delivered effectively and efficiently.

B.C.'s current immunization program for children is one of the most comprehensive in the country and includes vaccinations for: diphtheria, whooping cough (pertussis), tetanus, polio, hepatitis B, haemophilus influenzae B, measles, mumps, german measles (rubella), pneumococcal disease and meningococcal type C meningitis. A chickenpox vaccine for people most at risk of severe complications was implemented in July 2004 and whooping cough was included in the Grade 9 booster program in January 2004.

Other Public health investments under this funding include the West Nile virus program, drinking water protection, emergency planning activities, disease prevention initiatives, the meat inspection regulation and HIV/AIDS follow-up and prevention initiatives.

The BC Centre for Disease Control is one of the five regional centres for Canada's new national public health agency, based in Winnipeg.

Under the recent federal provincial health accord, British Columbia will see a total of \$5.4 billion in new federal health funding over the next 10 years. Increased federal investment in preventative health measures allows implementation of immunization programs that protect from infectious diseases. B.C. will continue to work with other partners to help develop Canada's new National Immunization Strategy.

Earlier this year, the federal government announced initial investments in a National Immunization Strategy and other public health initiatives. This \$17 million is part of those federal funds announced earlier this year.

1 backgrounder(s) attached.

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