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## NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Health

### **B.C. FAMILIES BENEFIT FROM 100 YEARS OF IMMUNIZATION**

VICTORIA – The centennial anniversary of vaccinations in B.C. was marked today with the launch of a new immunization framework. Health Minister George Abbott made the announcement at Helmcken House, home to Dr. John Sebastian Helmcken, one of the province’s first physicians and a strong public health advocate.

“The Province has been protecting families from disease since the first publicly funded immunization program against smallpox began one hundred years ago,” said Abbott. “British Columbia’s new strategic framework lays the foundation for the next 100 years, supporting health professionals in doing their best to protect our families and children from disease.”

The framework, one of the first in Canada, creates a collaborative best practices approach, supporting immunization programs and providers while ensuring British Columbians are provided the best possible protection against vaccine-preventable diseases. Priority areas include:

- Improving access to immunization services;
- Creating an integrated immunization registry;
- Ensuring an adequate supply of knowledgeable, trained service providers;
- Promoting the immunization program publicly and with health care professionals;
- Improving the vaccine inventory management system; and
- Creating and supporting immunization research.

“Old diseases once thought eradicated in B.C. and Canada could re-emerge if we fail to sustain widespread immunization,” said Provincial Health Officer Dr. Perry Kendall. “Increasingly mobile populations in what has become a global village demand heightened attention to immunization efforts.”

In 2006/07, \$36 million was allocated within the BC Centre for Disease Control for the purchase and distribution of vaccines, while regional health authorities allocated additional funds and the staffing required to deliver immunization services across the province. Funding has more than doubled from \$15 million in 2002/03.

In 2003, British Columbia introduced a vaccine program against invasive pneumococcal disease, responsible for many other infections, including pneumonia and meningitis. The results of this program were impressive. In children aged 12 to 23 months, for example, the number of cases decreased from 55 in 2002 to just six cases in 2005.

There are currently 14 government-funded immunization programs in British Columbia, providing protection from diseases such as annual influenza, diphtheria, tetanus, pneumococcal and meningococcal, measles, mumps and rubella.

For information on the vaccination program, visit BC HealthGuide OnLine at [www.bchealthguide.org](http://www.bchealthguide.org) and see BC HealthFiles, or call BC NurseLine toll-free at 1-866-215-4700 provincewide or 604-215-4700 in Greater Vancouver.

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