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Press Release

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Alaska's childhood immunization rates decline

State falls to 49th in the nation

ANCHORAGE, AK — The recently released National Immunization Survey has placed Alaska near the bottom of all states in childhood immunization rates. The survey, which has been conducted annually by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) since 1994, examines the rate of immunization for children between the ages of 19 months and 35 months.

For 2009, the national average for completion of the recommended childhood immunizations was 70.5 percent, while Alaska's coverage rate was 56.6 percent. With this coverage rate, Alaska ranked 49th among all states.

"It's critical that we help parents understand that childhood vaccinations are the safest and most effective way to protect their children from *preventable* illnesses," said Laurel Wood, Alaska's immunization program manager. "Parents should talk with their child's health care provider for more information and to assure their children are up-to-date with the immunizations."

Strategies the state is using to increase childhood vaccination rates include:

- strengthening partnerships with health care providers;
- surveying parents to determine perceived barriers to immunizations;
- increasing educational opportunities for providers and parents; and
- using VacTrAK (Alaska's immunization information system) for development and publication of immunization coverage rates for specific communities.

The state has published a *Bulletin* encouraging providers to join in the efforts to increase childhood vaccine rates. To see the *Bulletin* go to:

http://www.epi.hss.state.ak.us/bulletins/docs/b2011_02.pdf

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