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**Contact: Terry Eimen, PIO Officer
(815)432-2483
teimen@co.iroquois.il.us**

Watseka – Do you have a preteen or teen? Protect them against serious diseases!

Leaving their lunch at home, forgetting to get a permission slip signed, suddenly needing a ride somewhere after school... you knew there would be days like this. But did you know that as they get older, girls and boys are at increased risk for some infections? Also, the protection provided by some childhood vaccines begins to wear off. Immunizations can help protect your kids, as well as their friends, community, and other family members around them like babies or grandparents.

There are four vaccines recommended for preteens and teens:

Tdap vaccine, which is a booster against tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis. Pertussis, or whooping cough, is common and on the rise in the United States. It can keep children out of school and activities for weeks but it is most dangerous – and sometimes even deadly – for babies who can catch it from family members, including older siblings. Tdap is required in Illinois schools for students entering 6th-12th grade.

HPV vaccine, which protects against the types of HPV that most commonly cause cancer. HPV can cause future cancers of the cervix, vulva and vagina in women and cancers of the penis in men. In both women and men, HPV also causes cancers in the back of the throat, anal cancer and genital warts. HPV vaccine is most effective when given to teens before they are ever exposed to the virus.

Meningococcal vaccine, which protects against meningococcal disease. It is an uncommon but serious disease that can cause infections of the covering of the brain and spinal cord (meningitis) and blood (bacteremia). This vaccine is now a requirement for Illinois students entering 6th, 7th, and 12th grade.

Influenza (flu) vaccine, because even healthy kids can get the flu, and it can be serious. All kids, including your preteens and teens, should get the flu vaccine every year. Parents should also get vaccinated to protect themselves and to help protect their children from the flu.

Talk with your child's doctor or nurse to find out which vaccines your preteens and teens need. The Iroquois County Public Health Department also has these vaccines available and can answer your questions about necessary vaccines. Contact the health department at 815-432-2483 for more information or to schedule an appointment. More information is also available on CDC's Vaccine for Preteens and Teens website at www.cdc.gov/vaccines/teens.