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By RACHEL COLEMAN

• Leader & Times

The first day of school is less than a month away, with enrollment set to begin Aug. 1. But the new academic year is already briskly underway at the Seward County Health Department, where parents are bringing children in to update their immunizations.

“It’s fairly early still, but we are trying to encourage parents to get the immunizations done early,” said SCHED nurse Charly Madden. Whether they heed the early warning or not, Madden noted, students must complete several immunizations in order to attend school.



“When they go in to enroll, that’s when they find out. The school nurses look at the kids’ shot records, and a lot of times, they need to get caught up,” said Madden. With nearly 5,000 students in the Liberal school district, the health department sees heavy traffic at the beginning of each school year.

As required by state law, any individual who attends school or early childhood programs operated by a school must be immunized for:

- Diphtheria, Tetanus, Pertussis (DTaP)
  
- Poliomyelitis (IPV/OPV)
  
- Measles, Mumps, Rubella
  
- Hepatitis B
  
- Varicella (chicken pox)
  
- Haemophilus influenza type b (Hib)
  
- Pneumococcal conjugate (PCV)
  
- Hepatitis A

Madden said the health department also recommends vaccination for meningitis, human papillomavirus (HPV) and influenza, though these are not required by law. Occasionally, she noted, parents are resistant to the idea of immunizing their children.

“We try to reassure them about the safety of the vaccines, and the benefits of getting them,” she

said. "It's not just building immunity for one person, it's for building that herd immunity, which is why we don't see outbreaks of disease."

Last year, when communities throughout Kansas struggled to contain rapidly spreading pertussis, commonly known as whooping cough, Seward County emerged unscathed.

"That happened in other parts of the state, but we never saw it here," Madden said, "and it's because people are taking it seriously that immunization is important."

For school enrollment, nurses check a student's shot record to confirm that the necessary immunizations are complete. Many must be administered in four or five doses, beginning in early childhood. If a student completed the shots in Seward County, retrieving a record when the family no longer possesses a pink paper copy is a simple matter.

"If they had the shots here [at the health department], we have the records," noted Madden. "Otherwise, we have to get it from the doctor's offices."

With a large immigrant population from Mexico, Guatemala and other foreign countries, Liberal's local health department often encounters clients who have no shot record at all.

"If it's impossible to find a record, we have to start over," Madden said. "We've had people come in who are, oh, older than 80 years old. We serve everybody."

The department also serves everybody all the time, with walk-in hours offered for immunization services.

"You don't have to make an appointment, just come during our regular hours," Madden said. "We have a nurse working over the lunch hour, so people can take advantage of that time."

That's good news for parents and students, who are not allowed to attend public school if their immunizations are inadequate. Because the health department operates as a county service, all people are served, including those with or without insurance, state medical cards, or no health coverage at all. Fees vary according to the person's coverage, and the income level.

Madden recommends a phone call to the health department if a patient plans to come on Thursdays, which sometimes vary in terms of health services and special clinics. Otherwise, the health department is open from 8:30 to 4 p.m. Monday through Thursday, and from 9 to 11 a.m. on Fridays. The phone number is 624-3369.

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