The childhood immunization program in the United States has long been regarded as the hallmark of preventive health. Childhood immunizations have resulted in a reduction of at least 90% from the highest reportable occurrence of a host of vaccine preventable diseases. This success with immunization has been listed as one of the ten greatest achievements in public health during the past century. Furthermore, childhood immunization rates serve as an accurate indicator of the status of child health in general, preventive health in particular, and the inequitable distribution of child health services. The use of unmandated child preventive services such as preschool immunizations serves as a surrogate for the use of other preventive health services. For all these reasons, childhood immunization is a priority for the New Mexico Department of Health (DOH) and the Governor’s Office.

The immunization rate for school-aged children, when immunizations are mandated by law, has long been at over 95%. However, when I conducted the study for my dissertation in the early 1990’s with a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the preschool immunization rate across the country was unacceptably low. In addition to the predictable parental risk factors of lack of knowledge, competing priorities, and lower socioeconomic status, several provider problems were also identified that contributed significantly to this low rate. Specifically, there was no acceptable system to access immunization coverage in the preschool-aged population and there was no tracking of preschoolers to encourage age-appropriate immunization.

Given findings from my research those many years ago, I was particularly pleased at the initiation of the New Mexico Statewide Immunization Information System (NMSIIS) that links immunization records among providers and tracks the immunizations of all children in New Mexico. The DOH Immunization Program has come a long way. We are currently celebrating the state’s achievement in raising its child immunization rates 16.7% in the past two years. This noteworthy increase will be recognized by CDC this year when New Mexico receives the award for the most improved state in the country. With its Shots on Time Project, the DOH contracts “shot nurses” to provide hands-on assistance to providers to implement or improve vaccination systems in their practice. The Done by One Initiative was developed by the New Mexico Medical Society/DOH collaborative (the Clinical Prevention Initiative) to allow for an accelerated childhood immunization schedule. Infants are most likely to be seen...
in the doctor’s office their first year of life. Our data indicate improvement in practices that have adopted the condensed schedule.

In the evolution of child immunizations in New Mexico, there has been a dramatic transition in who gives shots. The private sector has taken up the responsibility in serving as the child’s medical home. At the same time, the public health staff continues their support in advocacy, monitoring and serving as a safety net. This emphasizes the critical role that the private providers play in ensuring that all children are vaccinated and the critical partnership that exists between the public and private sector.

In collaboration with the University of New Mexico and with additional funding from the Governor’s Office and the DOH, the New Mexico Immunization Coalition has developed into a cohesive effective arm of action.

It provides mini grants to community partners to carry out immunization activities and sponsors a yearly provider awards dinner and other provider awareness events in April as part of the National Infant Immunization Week. First Lady Barbara Richardson serves as Honorary Chair. The Coalition brings together representatives from both the public and private sector on a regular basis to exchange ideas, strategies and innovative activities.

Childhood immunizations protect our most vulnerable and precious population – our children.

Kristine Suozzi, PhD

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Assuring a childhood safe from the ravages of vaccine-preventable diseases is an important step toward creating a healthy childhood.

Providing childhood immunizations to all children also lays the framework for the use of other preventive health services to assure that these children and their families remain healthy.


April 24-30, 2005 is National Infant Immunization Week, and New Mexico has been chosen as the kickoff state for the nation! In honor of NIIW and Vaccination Week in the Americas, New Mexico will be hosting several events in the Las Cruces and border area. New Mexico is collaborating with the National Centers for Disease Control, the Pan American Health Organization and the US Mexico Border Health Commission to make this a truly international event.

The New Mexico Immunization Coalition, the New Mexico Department of Health Immunization Program, the Border Health Office and the Doña Ana Immunization Coalition have planned a number of events during NIIW to celebrate the progress NM has made in improving our immunization rates, and to bring attention to the issue of immunizations.

We will be hosting several lectures by national and international immunization experts: Dr. Paul Offit, Director of the Vaccine Education Center at Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia and Dr. Stephen Cochi, Director of the National Immunization Program at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, will be giving presentations and speaking with the media as part of our NIIW events. We are honored to have both of them participating with us.

In addition, many other dignitaries will be participating in our NIIW activities: First Lady Barbara Richardson, Dr. Kenneth Moritsugu, Deputy Surgeon General, Windy Hill, Associate Commissioner for Headstart, Dr. Carissa Etienne, Assistant Director for the Pan American Health Organization, Dr. Jon Andrus, Chief of the Immunization Unit at PAHO, and Dr. Romeo Rodriguez, Director General del Centro Nacional para la Salud de la Infancia y la Adolescencia. We are very pleased to have attracted such high level attention to our New Mexico events.

As part of our NIIW events, we will be hosting a press conference at Memorial Medical Center, as well as Grand Rounds at St. Vincent’s Hospital in Santa Fe, Grand Rounds at UNM Health Sciences Center, and Grand Rounds at Memorial Medical Center. We will also be holding a training for Community Health Workers and other health care providers from both Mexico and New Mexico in Sunland Park. The culmination of our NIIW events will be a special Provider Awards Dinner at the Hilton in Las Cruces. We will be honoring and recognizing providers who have achieved immunization coverage rates of above 90% in their practices. In addition, we will be recognizing three extraordinary immunization champions, who have gone above and beyond the call of duty to promote immunizations in New Mexico. Both Mexico and Texas will also present several awards.

For more information, please visit the NMIC website and consult the calendar of events. http://hsc.unm.edu/programs/nmimmunization/

The office of the Governor has declared April to be “Childhood Immunization Awareness Month” in New Mexico for the second year running.
## April
- 4/24-30, National Infant Immunization Week (NIIW)
- 4/23-30, Vaccination Week in the Americas (VWA)
- 4/28, Grand Rounds/Awards luncheon, St. Vincent’s, Santa Fe, noon
- 4/28 Grand Rounds, UNM-HSC, College of Nursing/Pharmacy, 5pm
- 4/29, Grand Rounds luncheon, Memorial Medical Ctr., Las Cruces, noon
- 4/29, NIIW/VWA Awards dinner, Hilton Las Cruces, 6pm
- 4/30, NIIW/VWA Border events, Juárez, México, 10:30am

## May
- 5/19, NMIC full coalition meeting, Albuquerque Hilton, 11am-3pm

## June
- 6/16, NMIC Steering Committee meeting

## July
- 7/21, NMIC Steering Committee meeting

## August
- 8/18, NMIC Steering Committee meeting
- 8/20, Shots for Tots to Teens event, around New Mexico