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Back-To-School Health

Community Event Highlights Health Disparities

*San Francisco Giants on Hand to Remind Parents that
Immunizations are Required for School Entry*

San Francisco, CA – The San Francisco Immunization Coalition and San Francisco Department of Public Health were joined by community partner San Francisco Giants today at **Maxine Hall Health Center** to remind parents and students that vaccines are required to attend school. As part of the event, a seventh grader and a pregnant woman each received a Tdap (pertussis booster) vaccine.

Along with immunization reminders, the event also gave health officials an opportunity to highlight the continuing problem of health disparities for certain groups in San Francisco, especially among African-American children where two-year-olds are less immunized than other groups. Children with incomplete immunization protection are vulnerable to a number of communicable diseases. African-American children in San Francisco also have higher infant mortality rates and levels of diabetes.

There is help and hope for eliminating these disparities. “Immunization, better nutrition, safer communities that promote exercise, and helping black women have healthy pregnancies are some of the solutions we are working on that will improve the health for these children,” observed Karon Fields of the San Francisco Black Infant Health Improvement Project.

San Francisco Giants team member, Sergio Romo is also someone who knows what it takes to defeat a formidable opponent. “In order to stay in first place it takes all players on the team to back each other up. As a city, we need to make sure every child gets a healthy start and is protected from disease,” said Romo.

This year marks the second year that seventh graders are required by the State of California to get a Tdap booster vaccine to enter school. Nationally, rates of pertussis are at their highest levels in 50 years, with eight deaths since the start of 2012. California has not had a death from pertussis since 2010, indicating the State has had some success in preventing pertussis through greater awareness and immunization. Health officials recommend that everyone who will be around infants get a Tdap booster vaccine. It is recommended that pregnant women in their third trimester get one dose of Tdap before the birth of their baby if they have not had a previous dose.

Mariah Bianchi, a San Francisco mother, nurse, and nationally-recognized health advocate, lost her baby, Dylan, to pertussis. “We need to make sure that this tragedy doesn’t happen again for any other family. That is the reason that we are out here,” she said.

The San Francisco Immunization Coalition, with a membership comprised of Bay Area health care workers, community advocates, public and private sector organizations, has been working to educate and raise awareness about pertussis and other vaccine-preventable diseases since 1996. The Coalition has also been advocating for research and development into a longer-lasting pertussis vaccine as immunity from the current vaccine, like the disease, wears off. Several Giants players have been featured in public service announcements about whooping cough, including Pablo Sandoval. The Giants Community Fund announced it was supporting the Coalition's educational efforts with a grant.

James Watt, MD, Chief of Communicable Disease Control for the California Department of Public Health summed it up when he said, "Immunizations are one of public health's most valuable contributions to the health of this country and throughout the world. I urge all parents to get their children's immunization schedule up to date. Vaccines save lives."

"As with immunization, disparities in health indicators such as diabetes and infant mortality prevent children from getting a healthy start to life. We are here today to bring that message to all San Franciscans," said Catherine James, MD, Medical Director of Maxine Hall Health Center, where the event took place.

Maxine Hall Health Center, a community-oriented primary care clinic of the San Francisco Department of Public Health, serves the Western Addition and surrounding neighborhoods. The Health Center has monthly drop-in hours for immunization services. For more information on where to get immunizations and other health services in San Francisco, call 311.

The San Francisco Immunization Coalition (SFIC) is a non-profit organization whose mission is to achieve and maintain full immunization protection for each child and adult in San Francisco in order to promote community health and prevent the spread of vaccine-preventable diseases. Additional information about SFIC can be found at www.sfimmunize.org. SFIC and the San Francisco Giants have an 8 year continuing partnership.

IMPORTANT MESSAGES FOR PARENTS & STUDENTS:

- Seventh graders require one dose of pertussis vaccine called Tdap to enter school this year.
- Pertussis reached epidemic levels in California in 2010, and are at historically high levels in 2012 across the U.S.
- To attend child care and school, children need specific vaccines. Go to <http://shotsforschool.org> to find out which vaccines for which grade levels.
- Health disparities exist for African-American children in San Francisco in several areas including infant mortality, diabetes, and immunization.
- Call 311 in San Francisco for more information on where to get immunization and other health services in San Francisco.
- California law allows parents to opt out of vaccination for their children for religious or personal belief reasons.
- Relevant Websites:
 - <http://www.sfimmunize.org> – San Francisco Immunization Coalition
 - <http://sfcdep.org> – San Francisco Department of Public Health
 - <http://blackinfanthealthsf.org> - Black Infant Health Project
 - <http://shotsforschool.org> - California Department of Public Health – Shots for School