

Black Doctors Raise Immunization Awareness Give Minorities New Shot at Life

Closing the Gap, Adult Immunizations Save Lives • November 1998

To the National Medical Association (NMA), “Immunization is more than a shot in the arm...it’s a shot at life.” According to Yvonné Fuller, national director of the National Immunization Outreach Efforts (NIOES), Immunization rates among adults are too low, especially among minorities. “Everyone has a role to play in increasing and maintaining high immunization rates among African American adults and children,” she said.

In 1995, the NMA initially developed the NIOES to ensure that 19- to 35-month-old children were adequately immunized against vaccine-preventable diseases. However in 1997, after reviewing the data and seeing the increased disparity in African American adult immunization rates, the program was expanded to address adult immunization issues.

Part of a cooperative agreement with HHS's Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, NIOES's goals are to:

- increase awareness of vaccine- preventable diseases and immunization rates among African Americans and other minority adults;
- promote the adult immunization message to African Americans and other minority adults;
- decrease missed opportunities among providers; and
- encourage community and private sector organizations to support providers in adult immunization outreach efforts.

Provider education and advocacy activities take place in target areas such as Detroit, Mich.; Los Angeles, Calif.; the District of Columbia; St. Croix, Virgin Islands; Houston, Texas; and Miami, Fla. Educational information is also distributed to NMA providers nationwide.

NIOES educational activities include an immunization workshop, “Immunizing the Urban and Minority Child/Adult,” that serves as an update for physicians, nurses, and other allied health professionals who work with urban and minority children and adults. Regional and local updates are tailored to individual needs. Workshops also address changes, updates and emerging concerns in the immunization arena.

Meetings outside the target areas are scheduled in conjunction with other national, state, local organizations and health departments. In addition to the workshops, NIOES:

- provides technical support in the development and implementation of local immunization initiatives; and
- creates and distributes educational immunization information geared toward African Americans and other minorities.

The NMA is the oldest professional membership association representing more than 22,000 Black physicians and other minority physicians in the United States, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Established in 1895, throughout its history the NMA has focused on improving the health status and outcomes of minority and disadvantaged people. The NMA calls upon its own network of member physicians, as well as NMA state and local societies, to implement NIOES within specific geographic areas.

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