

# LNP<sup>TM</sup>

LancasterOnline

## PUBLIC HEALTH

# Doctors push for vaccines

*Officials: Winter could bring surge of COVID-19, flu, RSV*

**CHRISTINA VAN WAASBERGEN**  
CWAASBERGEN@LNPNEWS.COM

Area pediatricians are urging parents and caregivers to make sure their children are up to date on vaccines as public health officials warn of a possible surge of COVID-19, flu and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) this winter.

Ideally, school-age children who haven't yet received a bivalent COVID-19 booster should get it at least two weeks before school starts to give them time to build up immunity, said Dr. Vinitha Moopen, a pediatrician at WellSpan Family & Pediatric Medicine — Rothsville in Warwick Township. Bivalent boosters target both the original strain of COVID-19 and the omicron variant. With many schools starting on or close to Aug. 22, that means the next several weeks are key.

According to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, children ages 6 and older who aren't immunocompromised need at least one dose of the updated COVID-19 booster to be considered up to date. Children 6 months to 5 years will need

**VACCINES**, page A5



BLAINE SHAHAN | FILE PHOTO

A syringe is filled with the Johnson & Johnson Janssen COVID-19 vaccine.

# Vaccines: Docs urge

Continued from A1

a second dose four to eight weeks after the first if they haven't received any COVID-19 vaccines before.

According to state data, only 16.4% of Lancaster County residents, or 89,488 people, have received a bivalent COVID-19 booster since Sept. 2, 2022.

Dr. Jennifer Ammons, a pediatrician at Roseville Pediatrics in Lancaster city, said parents whose children aren't fully vaccinated for COVID-19 should arrange to get them vaccinated as soon as possible, particularly if they fall into the category that needs more than one dose.

"If the child has not been vaccinated at all, it's going to take a little bit of time to get them up to date," Ammons said.

Last month, the Food and Drug Administration recommended that vaccine manufacturers make a single-strain COVID-19 booster targeting an omicron subvariant that is currently one of the dominant COVID-19 strains in the U.S. The boosters are expected to become available this fall.

Moopen said it's also important to make sure children are up to date on their routine vaccinations.

"We've seen a decrease in our vaccine rates of regular school vaccines, and so we've also seen an uptick in those diseases," she said. "We've seen quite a few pertussis or whooping cough cases. We've seen some chickenpox cases."

caught up before school starts.

There could be a surge of COVID-19, flu and RSV this winter as people resume gathering regularly in close quarters indoors, public health officials warn. There is currently no RSV vaccine approved for people under 60. Ammons said in healthy school-age children, RSV isn't likely to result in a serious infection.

"If a child has underlying medical conditions or they're fragile for some reason, certainly it could be a more severe illness, but in general, for school-aged kids, they're going to have similar symptoms as a cold," Ammons said.

Ammons said the flu vaccine typically comes out after Labor Day, so that's a good time to start checking with your children's health care provider to see when it's going to be available. Both Moopen and Ammons recommended children get the flu vaccine as soon as it's available and said there's no need to space out the COVID-19 and flu vaccines.

"It's safe to get together and with any of the other routine immunizations as well," Ammons said.

Ammons said soreness at the injection site is the most common side effect for the COVID-19 and flu vaccines.

"They can see some redness and swelling at the site, too," she said. "Fever would be uncommon but possible and not worri-

Both the World Health Organization and the CDC have described notable declines in routine childhood vaccination rates in recent years, which they attribute to disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Up to date on vaccines

Moopen said parents should talk to their child's health care provider to make sure they are up to date on their routine vaccines. She recommended having these conversations at the end of this month or the beginning of August so if children are missing vaccines they have time to get

some. And they might just feel a little fatigued and not themselves for a couple of days, but it's really minor compared to the symptoms that they could experience with the illness."

Ammons said it's important to make sure children are up to date on their vaccines, for both their own health and the health of those around them.

"It's the best way we have to protect kids and others in our community, too," she said. "Whether they can't get vaccinated, whether it's a grandparent, whether it's a neighbor who's going through some type of cancer treatment, that's our best bet."