

Immunization Clinics

Boost Children's Health And Parents Wallets

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When our son Ethan was born, the obstetrician announced that he was the loudest baby he had ever delivered. Ethan quickly lived up to his advanced billing. He could out holler the rock and roll band that practiced next door. And while all the neighbors swore they could never hear the baby, they

often offered words of encouragement and bits of advice.

When he was three weeks old the vomiting started. For the next four months Ethan alternated between blood curdling screams and losing his meals. Eventually the doctors concluded that he was allergic to a number of foods including milk. Meanwhile we spent most of our spare time and

cash at the pediatricians.

We were just a week short of Ethan's two month check up when another young mother on a stringent budget shared an amazing discovery with us. "Did you know you can get free immunizations from the state health department?" she asked.

Although Lyn and I also have a three year old, we had never heard of this service. A call to the state health department confirmed the information.

According to Patricia Sanderson, the supervising nurse at the Berks and Schuylkill State Health Centers, shots have been available for at least 45 years but the types of families coming in for the service are changing.

"At one time most people coming in for the immunizations were of a lower economic status but now you see folks from all walks of life. Most people start coming to us because the cost of immunizations is so high. One person told me that it would cost \$50 to have the immunizations done at her doctor's and that she just couldn't afford it."

Even people with good health insurance are finding their way to the state health center. "Many insurance companies don't pay for well child care and immunizations," she explained.

In Berks County immunizations are offered in three locations. "We hold clinics in Reading, Kutztown and Boyertown. We get a lot of plain people at the Kutztown site. It gives them the opportunity to receive their immunizations without having to take their buggies into the city," Sanderson stated.

In Schuylkill County immunizations are also given at three sites along with additional services. Services vary from county to county. Because Schuylkill County does not have as many providers of health services, the state health center also offers child health conferences along with the immunizations. Children are weighed, given a physical exam and a nurse discusses the child's development with the parents. These services are offered at Pottsville, Shenandoah, and Tower City.

Parents aren't limited to services within the county of their residence. "Often we have parents from Dauphin County bring their children to the Tower City location," Sanderson added.

According to a pamphlet put out by the State Health Department there are 175 of these child conference centers in the state of Pennsylvania.

Armed with this information I scheduled Ethan for his first shots at the Reading state health center. Scheduling the first visit should be done well in advance.

"We advise expectant mothers in Berks and Schuylkill Counties to call us as soon as they bring the baby home from the hospital. In Berks County we advise most parents to get the first shots when their baby is 2 months old from their doctor, and to schedule for their next set of shots. In Schuylkill County we have more clinics and are normally able to schedule the babies for their first shots. Older children should be scheduled as soon as possible to keep them up to date," Sanderson said.

I followed the health center's advice and agreed to have Ethan



Peg Glering, a nurse at the State Health Center in Berks Co., gives Ethan VanTassel his second DPT shot.



Dylan Plehel, 2, leans on his aunt's arm after receiving his Hib vaccine. His aunt Debbie Berg brought Dylan because his mom was ill.

scheduled for his second shots, but due to his illness his first shots were delayed until it was time for him to make a visit to the center.

It is important to bring a record of the older child's shots to the clinic. "We won't give children a shot without their shot record in front of us. You can tell your physician to get your record. Many mothers bring their baby books," Sanderson said.

On shot day, I left the house with a beach bag full of diapers, assorted toys, baby food and a

snack for Ethan's big brother Zach. I wasn't sure what I would find when we arrived at the center city location. Sanderson had warned that waiting at the Reading site was normally half an hour to 45 minutes and that Schuylkill County could be longer because of the physical. She added, "I wouldn't schedule anything else to close to the shot. Nothing worse than worrying about making an appointment."

I was pleasantly surprised when
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Dana Gehr, 19 months, comes over to check out the fun, that Charles Zellner, 1, is having in the toy box at the State Health Center.



Ethan VanTassel, 6 months, recovers quickly to play with his big brother Zach, 3.

Homestead Notes