

## Have You Been Shot?

### August is National Immunization Awareness Month

Did you know that immunizations are not just about the young but cross the life span, from infants to the elderly.

August is the perfect time to catch up on you and your family's vaccinations. Parents enrolling their children in school know they have to get immunizations current before they will be allowed to start the year, students entering college generally have certain immunization requirements, and healthcare workers are preparing for the upcoming flu season.

### **Why are immunizations important?**

Immunization is one of the most important public health achievements of the 20th century. Vaccines have eradicated smallpox, eliminated wild poliovirus in the United States, and significantly reduced the number of cases of measles, diphtheria, rubella, pertussis and other diseases. In spite of these efforts, people in the U.S. still die from these and other diseases that can be prevented by vaccination.

Vaccines offer safe and effective protection from infectious diseases. By staying up-to-date on the recommended vaccines, individuals can protect themselves, their families and friends and their communities from serious, life-threatening infections.



### **Vaccinations – they're not just for children any more**

Getting immunized is a lifelong, life-protecting effort. Recommended vaccinations start soon after birth and continue throughout life. Make sure that you regularly discuss vaccine recommendations for infants, children, adolescents and adults of all ages and take steps to be sure that you and your family receive these immunizations. These are major steps to protecting yourselves from disease. It is important to review current recommendations with

your primary healthcare professional since new vaccines become available and recommendations change over time.

### **When are immunizations given?**

Because children are particularly vulnerable, most vaccines are given during the first five to six years of life. Other immunizations are recommended during adolescent or adult years and, for certain vaccines, such as tetanus, booster immunization are recommended throughout life. Some immunizations are more seasonal, like the "flu shot" to protect you during the winter "flu season." Vaccines against certain diseases that may be encountered when traveling outside of the U.S. are recommended for travelers to specific regions of the world.

### **Will my Plan cover this?**

The TICUA Benefit Consortium Plan covers immunizations under the preventive care benefit. For infants through age 4 this is provided under the "Well Child Care" benefit. For everyone else there is a benefit just for Immunizations which covers vaccinations recommended by your physician at 100% and is not subject to any deductible or copay.

# Health Matters!

## How Involved Are You with Your Healthcare?

Healthcare reform, and especially healthcare cost control is in the news every where you look these days. It seems that you cannot go one day without hearing something about it. In the national political debate on what should be the federal government's role in healthcare reform an area of concern to all is how to control increases in healthcare costs in the future.

One of the most effective ways to control healthcare costs is to be actively involved in making decisions about your own healthcare. To see just how much, or how little, you manage your healthcare, score the following statements with how much you agree or disagree with them as follows: strongly agree – D; agree – C; disagree – B; strongly disagree – A; Does Not Apply – E, and; Don't Know – F.

1. I know what each medication I take does and why I take it.
2. I have a regular doctor to whom I go when I have health issues.
3. When I seek medical help for a health condition I discuss treatment options with the health provider.
4. When I am prescribed a new medication I discuss it with the prescribing health provider.
5. I follow through fully on medical treatments a doctor tells me to do.

6. I can tell when I can handle a health problem without medical care and when I need to get medical care.
7. I act to help prevent or minimize some of my health conditions.
8. I understand my existing health conditions and what I need to do about them.
9. I know the different treatment options available for my health conditions.
10. Being actively involved in my own healthcare is the most important factor in determining my health.
11. In the end, I am the person who is responsible for managing my health.

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## Helpful Hints

### **Computer Injuries on the Rise, especially children**

A study in the July issue of The American Journal of Preventive Medicine estimates that in 2006 there were 9,279 emergency room visits for computer-related injuries, compared to only 1,267 in 1994.



“Children under 5 had the highest overall injury rate as well as the greatest injury rate increase of any group,” said the study's senior author, Lara B.

McKenzie, of the Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio. “Computer cases have sharp edges, wires can be electrical or tripping hazards, and computer chairs are too big for young children, which provides opportunities for falls. **We have to look at the computer work station as an area we can make safe for children.**”

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## **Bet You Didn't Know**

According to a recently published study in the BMJ (formerly British Medical Journal), some “key” items have been identified in the Mediterranean diet, which diet has been widely held to greatly improve life expectancy.

Conducted over a roughly eight and one-half year period, the study “scored” those in the study on how close their diets were to the “traditional” Mediterranean diet. Dietary considerations included how many vegetables, legumes, fruits and nuts, fish and seafood, and cereals were consumed, along with how little meat, meat products, and dairy products were consumed, as well as the ratio of monounsaturated (olive oil) to saturated (butter) fats. Alcohol consumption, mostly in the form of wine during meals, close to a “moderate level” also scored favorably, while no or excessive consumption scored unfavorably.

The major findings were that those

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in the study who scored higher (closer to the diet “ideal”) had lower overall mortality. While each individual part of the diet had some effect, the combined overall impact was more significant than any of the parts. The parts of the diet that seems to have the greatest impact? Moderate intake of alcohol, low intake of meat and meat products and high intake of vegetables topped the list, followed about evenly by high intake of fruit and nuts, more unsaturated than saturated fats, and high intake of legumes. Surprisingly, high intake of cereals, low intake of dairy products and eating fish and seafood finished on the bottom of the list based on degree of apparent impact.

## How Involved...

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To complete your “score”, give yourself 2 points for each “D”, 1 point for each “C”, -1 for each “B”, -2 for each “A”, 0 for each “E” and -1 for each “F”.

The higher your score, the more it shows that you are actively involved in managing your healthcare, and the more likely you are to be holding down your healthcare costs. If you have a negative score you are pretty much letting others make all the decisions about your healthcare and therefore deciding your costs.

The more you can score 2 on each statement the more involved you are. By the way, if you have a score greater than 22, add it again.

## Heat Stroke

August is a prime time for heat stroke or other, less severe, “heat illnesses.” Scientists do not know why some people become seriously ill while exercising in hot weather and others do not. Heat illness covers a wide range of symptoms and conditions from nausea and heat exhaustion to unconsciousness and death from heat stroke. In August many athletes begin more intense training to prepare themselves for fall events, from football games to marathon runs.

The big problem is not the surrounding air temperature, although that can contribute.

Even humidity is only a contributor because it slows or stops the evaporation of sweat, which is one of the body’s main ways to cool. The big problem is internal body temperature. As people exercise, less than one-third of the energy generated by their muscles goes to contracting the muscles: the rest goes to body heat.

Studies as to why one person is more affected than another, or the same person is more affected on one day than another show a number of things that contribute. The biggest factor seems to be “simply” not being used to the heat. In order for your body to



be accustomed to the heat it takes regular exposure for anywhere from one week to three months. Other factors include: drinking alcohol before exercising; being overweight and/or out of shape; wearing too much or heavy clothing; and being feverish.

Symptoms of heat illness include: dizziness or fainting; heavy sweating; muscle cramps; cold or clammy skin; headache; rapid heartbeat; and nausea.

Actions you can take to avoid or reduce the likelihood of heat illnesses are: drink lots of water, preferably cool or cold (helps cool the body inside more than warm water); don't go outside during the hottest times of the day; avoid drinks with caffeine; and wear loose-fitting cotton clothes.

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