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**"Love Them, Protect Them, Immunize Them"
National Infant Immunization Week is April 24 – May 1, 2010**

Bay County - The Bay County Health Department is pleased to announce National Infant Immunization Week (NIIW), April 24-May 1, 2010. This year's theme is "Love them. Protect them. Immunize them." National Infant Immunization Week is an annual observance to promote the benefits of immunizations and to highlight the importance of immunizing infants against 14 vaccine-preventable diseases by age two. "Before vaccines, many children died from diseases such as whooping cough, measles, and polio that vaccines now prevent. Those same germs exist today, but vaccines now protect babies, so we do not see these diseases as often. Childhood vaccinations are one of the best ways for parents to protect their children against vaccine-preventable diseases," stated Sandon Speedling, Clinic Manager for the Bay County Health Department.

Nationwide, immunization levels remain high and vaccine-preventable diseases are at an all-time low. In 2008, Florida's immunization coverage level for children aged two was 83.4 percent. "Vaccines are among the most successful and cost-effective public health tools available for preventing disease and death. They not only help protect vaccinated individuals, but also help protect the entire community by preventing and reducing the spread of infectious diseases," stated Mr. Speedling. Immunization is a shared responsibility. Families, healthcare providers, and public health officials must work together to help protect the entire community.

Because of the success of vaccines in preventing disease in the United States, parents are often unaware that their children are at risk for so many serious and life-threatening diseases. Parents are encouraged to call or visit the Bay County Health Department or their private healthcare provider to ensure their child is vaccinated. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has educational materials at <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/events/niiw/default.htm>. Please call the Bay County Health Department at 872-4455 or visit www.baycountyhealth.org for more information on vaccines.

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