

Sheffield proclaims Tetanus-Diphtheria Booster Immunization Month

Governor Bill Sheffield has designated the month of March as Tetanus-Diphtheria Booster Immunization Month, according to John Pugh, Commissioner of the Department of Health and Social Services.

The department will implement a statewide tetanus-diphtheria (Td) booster immunization campaign throughout Alaska during March. The last Td campaign was held in 1975 in response to a major diphtheria epidemic, and resulted in the vaccination of over 180,000 Alaskans.

"The goal of this campaign is to prevent an outbreak of diphtheria and cases of tetanus by giving 10-year booster shots to maintain high immunization levels," said Commis-

sioner Pugh. He added that public health officials wish to promote preventive health through the use of vaccines, and raise awareness among adults and other high risk groups of the need to maintain vaccination levels.

"These diseases and their complications, which may result in death, are an unnecessary hazard to all Alaskans. The cost of doctor bills, hospitalization, and school days and wages lost can be prevented through vaccination," said Pugh.

The target population for the campaign is defined as adults who have not had a vaccination in the previous ten years, particularly those over 50 where tetanus mortality is the highest, and

school age children who are due for a Td booster.

This is the first major effort to update all adults' immunization status statewide, and it has already received support from many diverse organizations, Pugh said, including interested citizens, major oil companies, local health departments, physicians, and other health care providers.

The Division of Public Health is coordinating activities and scheduling local clinics in order to achieve the immunization of all Alaskan citizens against tetanus and diphtheria, and maintain a continued absence of cases of these diseases. Commissioner Pugh encouraged any Alaskans who had not been immunized in over 10 years to do this year.

March 1 is the kick-off date for the campaign, and will be symbolized by the beginning of the Iditarod Race which commemorates the diphtheria serum run to Nome. Each driver in the race this year will be carrying a vial of Td serum.