

August Health Awareness Days Provide Opportunities to Take Action

By Paul DeMiglio | August 27, 2013

As young people across the country go back to school, patient advocates and government stakeholders are leveraging awareness days to help communities learn about health issues impacting children, prevention strategies and efforts to improve care. Here are some examples:

Children's Eye Health and Safety Month

Each August organizations including the [Envision Foundation](#) underscore the need for screenings and examinations to promote early detection, intervention and prevention of vision problems in children.

Vision disorders in children cost Americans more than \$5.7 billion in direct and indirect expenses each year, while the overall cost of vision problems nationwide soars to an estimated \$139 billion (includes long-term care, productivity loss and medical bills), according to [Prevent Blindness America](#). Treating eye disorders and vision loss early in life helps protect children from developing chronic, lifelong conditions that become more expensive to treat because of long-term, indirect costs that increase as populations age.

"The beginning of a new school year is an exciting time in a child's life," Hugh R. Parry, President and CEO of Prevent Blindness America, said in a statement. "By working together with parents and educators, we hope to give all our kids a bright and healthy start!"

National Immunization Awareness Month

According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#), the National Public Health Information Coalition (NPHIC) highlights the need to improve national immunization coverage levels throughout August. To communicate the importance of immunizations now and throughout the year, NPHIC also developed a toolkit tailored to various populations including babies and pregnant women, pre-teens and teens, young adults, and adults. The toolkit seeks to:

- Encourage parents of young children to get recommended immunizations by age 2.
- Help parents ensure older children, preteens and teens have received all recommended vaccines by the time they return to school.
- Remind college students to catch up on immunizations before they move into dormitories.
- Educate adults, including health care workers, about vaccines and boosters they may need.
- Urge pregnant women to get vaccinated to protect newborns from diseases like whooping cough.
- Raise awareness that the next flu season is only a few months away.

The CDC also makes a wide array of resources available for those who want to learn more about the importance of immunizations or spread the word.

Neurosurgery Outreach Awareness Month

The American Association of Neurological Surgeons (AANS) is among the organizations that underscores why the beginning of the school year is a great time to educate communities about strategies to prevent sports-related head and neck injuries like concussions. AANS provides tools to help others more effectively identify symptoms of potentially serious head/neck injuries and take preventive steps to ensure safety, also offering the following tips:

- Buy and use helmets or protective headgear approved by the American Society for Testing Materials for sports 100 percent of the time.
- Remain abreast of the latest guidelines and rules governing sports with a high prevalence of head injuries including cheerleading, volleyball, and soccer.

“Concussion awareness, understanding the symptoms of a potential concussion or other traumatic brain injury, is critically important in all sports,” AANS Public Relations Committee chair Kevin Lillehei, MD, FAANS, said in a statement. “Educating the public is one of the best weapons we have when it comes to combating these types of injuries. That is why it’s so important to raise awareness in the community and explain just what some of the effects are that these injuries have.”

Psoriasis Awareness Month

Sponsored by The National Psoriasis Foundation each year, Psoriasis

Awareness Month is dedicated to “raise awareness, encourage research and advocate for better care for people with psoriasis.”

The most common autoimmune disease in the US affecting 7.5 million Americans, Psoriasis occurs when the immune system sends out faulty signals that speed up the growth of skin cells and produce red, scaly patches that itch and bleed. About 20,000 children under 10 are also diagnosed, often experiencing symptoms that include pitting and discoloration of the nails, severe scalp scaling, diaper dermatitis or plaques.

As part of Psoriasis Awareness Month, NPF is creating a community of “Pscientists” to “answer real-world questions about psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis.”

Spinal Muscular Atrophy Awareness Month

Although it’s considered a “rare disorder” with approximately 1 in 6000 babies born affected by it, Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA) is a motor neuron disease that causes voluntary muscles to weaken and in some cases can lead to death, according to the National Institutes of Health’s (NIH) National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS). Types I, II and III belong to a group of hereditary diseases that weaken the voluntary muscles in the arms and legs of infants and children, contributing to breathing issues, difficulty eating and drinking, impaired mobility and orthopedic complications.

Families of SMA, which has coordinated activities around SMA Awareness Month since 1996, and the Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA), are two national organizations that support those living with SMA. Click here to learn about events this month, community networks and research projects for treatment and therapies.

What activities are taking place in your community to support one or more of these awareness days? What could the institutions in your neighborhood, workplace or at your school be doing year-round to more effectively engage populations about critical health issues?

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