

ASSEMBLY DEMOCRATS NEWS RELEASE



FOR RELEASE:

October 21, 2002

Beth Auerswald
(609) 292-7065

CONTACT:

Assemblyman Greenwald

(856) 428-3343

Assemblywoman Weinberg

(201) 928-0100

**GREENWALD/WEINBERG TEAM WITH LACY, LIBRERA
TO PROMOTE STUDENT HEPATITIS B VACCINATIONS**

Lawmakers, State Officials Stress Importance of Vaccines For Students

(TRENTON) -- Seeking to protect students from a potentially fatal disease, Assemblyman Louis Greenwald and Assembly Majority Conference Leader Loretta Weinberg today accompanied top state health and education officials to herald a new state law that requires higher education students to be vaccinated for Hepatitis B.

Greenwald and Weinberg teamed with state Department of Health and Senior Services Commissioner Clifton R. Lacy and state Department of Education Commissioner William L. Librera to encourage high school and college students to be vaccinated under the new law. Senator Joseph Vitale (D-Middlesex) and a representative from the Trenton public school district and health organizations also accompanied the lawmakers.

ASince Hepatitis B is a highly communicable and dangerous disease, we must take every precaution to ensure that students are not catching and spreading the virus,≡ said Greenwald (D-Camden). AThe new law will facilitate the proper immunization of students in order to protect them from any unforeseen outbreaks in a school or on a campus.≡

In August, Governor James E. McGreevey signed into law a Greenwald/Weinberg/Vitale measure (A-1888) requiring full- and part-time students at state institutions of higher education to receive Hepatitis B (HBV) vaccines beginning in the 2008-2009 school year. High school students in grades 9 through 12 will be required to receive vaccinations starting with the 2003-2004 school year.

AThrough this aggressive vaccination effort and greater public awareness about the importance of protection against this viral liver disease, the number of people contracting HBV will continue to decrease,≡ said Weinberg (D-Bergen).

(MORE)

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that 20 to 30 percent of the 1.25 million Americans chronically infected with Hepatitis B contracted the disease during their childhoods.

High school and college students have enough on their plates without having to worry about contracting Hepatitis B, said Greenwald. Through education and vaccination, students will be able to concentrate on their studies instead of their health.

The Greenwald/Weinberg law requires students to show up-to-date evidence of their vaccinations to the institution of higher education or to the high school they attend. The students will be required to receive immunizations within nine months of entrance into school as a condition of enrollment and continued matriculation.

Moreover, educational institutions will be required to furnish the vaccine through their respective student health services programs or through contractual agreements with a community health care provider.

Ensuring that all students are vaccinated not only will keep each individual student protected from infection, but it also will curb any potential chance of a devastating outbreak, said Weinberg.

The law will allow schools and institutions to grant students an exemption due to an increased health risk for a student or a conflict with a student's, parent's, or guardian's religious beliefs.

According to the Hepatitis B Foundation, the disease is 100-times more infectious than HIV. The foundation estimated that more than one million Americans -- and 400 million people worldwide -- are chronic carriers of HBV.

An estimated 450,000 new cases of Hepatitis B were reported each year during the 1980s, according to the CDC. The rate dropped to approximately 80,000 new cases recorded in 1999.

The Hepatitis B vaccine has been available in this country since 1982.

Hepatitis B is spread through direct blood-to-blood contact, contact with bodily fluids that may contain blood, unprotected sex, and intravenous drug use. HBV also can be transmitted from a pregnant woman to her child during delivery.

An estimated 5,000 people die each year in the U.S. from Hepatitis B. People with Hepatitis B are at a higher risk of cirrhosis of the liver and liver cancer. Death from liver disease occurs in up to 25 percent of Hepatitis B patients.