



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Vaccinations Urged to Protect from Pertussis, Influenza**

GRAND RAPIDS - The Kent County Health Department (KCHD) in partnership with the Michigan Department of Community Health (MDCH) urges all Michigan residents to get vaccinated against pertussis and influenza, to protect themselves and vulnerable infants from these preventable diseases.

Pertussis, also known as whooping cough, has been making a comeback in Michigan. More than 1,500 cases were reported to the MDCH in 2010. Nearly 600 cases have been reported so far this year. During a news conference in Lansing this morning, Veronica McNally shared her story of loss. In May, her 3-month-old daughter Francesca – “Franny” - died from pertussis. Veronica and her son both had the disease, but it went undetected by health care providers. McNally says she was not told that tetanus-diphtheria-acellular pertussis (Tdap) vaccines for those around Franny could keep her daughter from contracting whooping cough. She also had her two older children on delayed immunization schedules. “In deciding to delay my children’s vaccination schedule, I thought I was doing what was in their best interest,” McNally said. “I thought I was informed. I thought I was on top of my children’s health. But I was naive.”

“Franny’s story is just heartbreaking. Vaccinations are the single most effective way to prevent illnesses like whooping cough or the flu,” said Cathy Raevsky, Administrative Health Officer of the Kent County Health Department. “Kent County has seen nine reported cases so far in 2012, the same number of cases reported in all of 2011. We need to protect our children and families from this serious disease that can have deadly consequences.”

In addition to pertussis warnings, flu season has arrived. Six children died in Michigan last year due to complications from influenza. “There are currently 12 confirmed cases of flu in Michigan,” says Raevsky. “The flu can have serious health impacts on children under the age of five, the elderly, and people with already-weakened immune systems. It takes two weeks to become effective, so now is the time to get vaccinated.” KCHD offers vaccinations for anyone age six months and older. Health care providers, people who take care of children and those who take care of the elderly should get vaccinated to protect vulnerable populations.

Flu vaccine injections are \$25, and the FluMist nasal spray is \$32. To make an appointment at any of our five clinic locations, dial (616) 632-7200, or schedule online at [www.sticktototheflu.com](http://www.sticktototheflu.com). For a schedule of when to get immunizations, go to <http://www.accesskent.com/Health/HealthDepartment/Immunizations/immun.htm>.

The McNally Family is working to spread the message about the importance of vaccinations. “To all expectant mothers, I urge you: please ask your doctor about vaccination against pertussis and flu for you and all members of your family,” said Veronica McNally. “Protect your infants.” To read more about Franny’s story, visit [www.frannystrong.org](http://www.frannystrong.org).

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KCHD has been in the business of providing health services to Kent County since 1931. The Health Department is home to nearly 260 employees including public health nurses, sanitarians, health educators, technicians, public health administrators, and specialized staff at the Kent County Animal Shelter. The Health Department operates one main clinic and four satellite clinics located in Wyoming, Kentwood, Rockford, and Grand Rapids. To learn more about KCHD services, visit [www.accesskent.com/health](http://www.accesskent.com/health).