By Sheri Hink

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The Department of Health and Human Services recently announced a new national policy which will impact the way childhood immunizations are administered in Chase County and across the nation.

A new national policy prohibits fully-insured children from getting their immunizations at public clinics, such as the Chase County Immunization Clinic.

Barbara Ludwid, Immunization Program Manager for the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, explains the new regulation, “Under the new Centers for Disease Control guidelines, children eligible for Vaccines for Children are the only ones who can receive government-purchased vaccine through Nebraska’s public immunization clinics.”

“VFC is a federally funded program that provides free vaccines to eligible children including those who have no health insurance or are underinsured (whose insurance does not cover vaccinations) or those who are American Indian or Alaska Native or Medicaid-enrolled,” explains Ludwid.

For more information about eligibility guidelines for the VFC program go to http://dhhs.ne.gov/publichealth/Pages/immunization_vfc.aspx.

Local shot clinic

The Chase County Immunization Clinic is run by Chris Tomky who serves as the staff coordinator. Its paid staff consists of Tomky and Maria Murillo who takes care of the clerical aspects of the clinic. Tomky and Murillo are paid by the health department.

Shots at the clinic are administered by nurses who are “off the clock” and paid by the county with donations received at the monthly clinics.

The clinic is open on the second Saturday of each month from 9:15 a.m. to 1 p.m. MT. The most recent immunization clinic was held last Saturday, Aug. 11.

Before the passage of the new national policy, any child was able to go to one of the monthly Chase County Immunization Clinics and receive vaccinations free-of-charge, with the option of making a free-will donation.

Now children who have health insurance will not be eligible to receive vaccinations at the public clinic. Insured children will be required to go to the private Chase County Community Clinic to receive their shots. Tomky said this change will go into effect immediately.

The future of the Chase County Immunization Clinic is not clear. Tomky said the clinic currently has funding through the end of 2012 but that additional changes to the clinic may happen as soon as Nov. 1.

Tomky indicated that the Chase County Immunization Clinic will most likely be absorbed by the Chase County Community Clinic.

At this point it is not clear how the Community Clinic will administer vaccinations–vaccination disbursement could be incorporated into regular clinic hours or be offered monthly like the Immunization Clinic is currently.

What this means to families

Tomky indicated individuals with insurance need to contact their insurance companies to see what, if any, vaccinations are covered under their plan.

She explained that individuals with insurance, even those with unmet deductibles, will not be eligible to receive government-funded vaccinations from this point on. Therefore, she suggested those with insurance contact their companies so they can be informed of what their out-of-pocket costs will be.

Children covered by the Medicaid program will still receive their shots free-of-charge. The change for Medicaid clients may be in the location or process of getting their shots. Depending on how the shot clinic is administered after the first of the year, their shots may be given at the regular clinic.