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IMMUNIZATIONS: Frequently Asked Questions

Vaccines now control many infectious diseases that were once common in this country. However, the viruses and bacteria that cause serious diseases still exist. The germs can be passed on to people who are not protected by vaccines. Here are answers to commonly asked questions.



Picture 1 Vaccines can prevent many serious diseases.

1. "Why should my child be immunized?"

Children need vaccinations (shots) to protect them from dangerous childhood diseases. These diseases have serious complications that can even kill children. Frequent doctor's visits, hospitalizations, or premature deaths may result if children do not get their shots. Sick children can also cause parents to lose time from work.

2. "What diseases do vaccines prevent?"

- Measles
- Mumps
- Polio
- Rubella (German measles)
- Pertussis (whooping cough)
- Diphtheria
- Tetanus
- *Haemophilus influenzae* type b (major cause of spinal meningitis)
- Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B
- Varicella (chickenpox)
- Pneumococcus (prevents one form of meningitis, and a kind of bacteria infection in the bloodstream)
- Influenza

3. "How many shots does my child need?"

The following vaccinations are recommended by age two. They can be given in a doctor's office or clinic in five visits.

- 3 shots against hepatitis B
- 4 shots against diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis (DTaP)
- 4 shots against *Haemophilus influenzae* type b (Hib)
- 3 shots against polio (IPV)
- 2 shots against hepatitis A given before 2 years of age.
- 1 shot against measles/mumps/rubella (MMR)
- 1 shot against varicella (chickenpox)
- 4 shots against pneumococcus (PCV) or (PPV)
- 1 to 2 shots against influenza every year for children between 6 and 23 months

4. **"Are the vaccines safe?"**

Serious reactions to vaccines are extremely rare, but do occur. However, the risks of serious disease from not vaccinating are far greater than the risks of serious reaction to the shots.

5. **"Do the vaccines have any side effects?"**

Yes, side effects can occur with shots, depending on the vaccine. Your child may have a slight fever, or rash or soreness where the shot was given. Don't be alarmed if your child is a little uncomfortable. This is normal. Your health care provider can give you more information on how to care for your child after vaccines are given.

6. **"What do I do if my child has a serious reaction?"**

If you think your child is having a reaction that seems severe or is persistent (continues or gets worse), call your doctor or get the child to a doctor right away. Write down what happened and the date and time it happened.

7. **"Why can't I wait until school to have my child immunized?"**

Vaccinations must begin at birth. Most shots are completed by age 2. By immunizing on time (by age 2), you can protect your child from being infected. You can also prevent the infection of others at school or at daycare centers. Children under 5 are especially prone to disease because their immune systems have not built up enough defenses to fight infections. Some diseases, such as pertussis and pneumococcal disease, are more dangerous or occur more often in children under two.

8. **"Why is a vaccination health record important?"**

A **vaccination health record** helps you and your health care provider keep your child on schedule. A record **should be started at birth** when your child receives the first shot. It should be updated each time your child receives shots. This information will help you if you move to a new area or change health care providers, or when your child is enrolled in daycare or starts school. Remember to bring this record with you every time your child has a health care visit.

9. **"Where can I get free vaccines?"**

The Vaccines for Children Program will provide free vaccines to children. Eligible children include those without health insurance coverage, all those who are enrolled in Medicaid, American Indians and Alaskan Natives. Many health departments and Children's Hospital offer these vaccines for only a small fee.

10. **"Where can I get more information?"**

You may call the National Immunization Information Hotline for further information about immunizations.

1-800-232-2522 (English)

1-800-232-0233 (Spanish)

Or you can visit them on the Internet at www.cdc.gov/nip.