

Tip Sheets

Immunizations: Protection for All



Immunizations help prevent dangerous and life-threatening diseases by strengthening the body's own natural defenses to fight off germs that cause

infection. For more than 50 years, they have helped keep individuals healthy and have reduced the number of infections from immunization-preventable diseases by more than 90%.

Common Questions and Concerns

1. Do vaccines really work?

Yes. All vaccine-preventable diseases have declined in countries in which there are successful immunization programs. When vaccination rates are high, disease rates are low. However, when vaccination rates drop the rates of disease and related deaths rise.

2. Are vaccines properly tested for safety?

Yes. Vaccines are safe and effective. As is the case with all medications, vaccines must go through many steps before being approved for use. Vaccines must be proven to be safe and effective at preventing the diseases that they target. Once a vaccine is in use, side effects continue to be monitored.

3. Do vaccines have side effects?

Serious side effects to vaccines are rare. The chance of getting sick from a vaccine-preventable disease is a far greater risk than having a serious side effect from the vaccine itself.

4. Are combined vaccines safe and beneficial?

Receiving several vaccines at the same time does not generally have a negative impact on a child's immune system. Children are exposed to many foreign substances that trigger an immune response each day. The simple act of eating introduces new antigens into the body. Children are exposed to more antigens from a common cold or sore throat than from vaccines.

5. Can the measles vaccine or measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine cause autism or other developmental disorders?

There is no scientific evidence to support this claim. Because signs of autism may appear around the same age that children receive the MMR vaccine, some believe the vaccine causes autism.

The 1998 study that suggested this relationship was found to have serious flaws in research methods and was withdrawn by the journal in which it was published.

The Facts

1. Vaccines save lives and protect against the spread of infectious disease.

Vaccines are necessary. They offer protection through the production of an immune response similar to that produced by the natural infection but without the risks of death or disability that accompany the natural infection.

Currently, children can be protected from 14 diseases before they are two years old. Each of these diseases can have a devastating impact on children if they are not vaccinated.

2. If vaccinations stop, deadly diseases will return.

Many vaccine-preventable diseases still occur in other parts of the world. Good hygiene, sanitation, clean water and nutrition are not sufficient to stop the spread of infectious diseases. If people are not vaccinated, diseases that have become uncommon, such as measles, whooping cough, mumps and polio, will quickly reappear.

3. Vaccines protect many.

Vaccines protect more than just the children who are immunized. The people close to them, such as infants who are too young to be vaccinated, children with special health care needs or disabilities and others whose immune systems do not work as well, are also protected.

Additional Resources

Those who have questions about vaccines should first talk with their health care provider. The Vaccine Safety Net, a global network of vaccine safety websites that are certified by the World Health Organization, also provides easy access to accurate and trustworthy information on vaccines.

Vaccine Safety Net

<http://www.vaccinesafetynet.org>

American Academy of Pediatrics

<https://www.healthychildren.org/english/safety-prevention/immunizations/pages/default.aspx>

Centers for Disease Control

<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/index.html>

“Immunization is actually one of the most incredible scientific innovations and has contributed hugely to preventing deaths – mostly of children – and to dramatic rises in life expectancy and economic development.”

Dr. Flavia Bustreo (April 2017)

Assistant Director-General for Family, Women’s & Children’s Health at World Health Organization (WHO)

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