



Wellness Monthly

Healthy matters to keep in mind.

August 2016

Childhood Vaccines Shots May Hurt a Little but Help a Lot

If you're like most parents, you've probably encountered your share of resistance each time you take your child or teen in for a shot. But you've probably also experienced those huge sighs of relief, say, after your child steps on a rusty nail but her tetanus shot is up to date or each year as you sail through flu season without any serious sickness, thanks to the annual flu shots you all got.

Why Are Childhood Vaccines So Important?

Before vaccines, many children died from diseases that vaccines now prevent, such as whooping cough, measles and polio. Those same germs exist today but because vaccines protect our children, we don't

see the diseases nearly as often. However, while vaccine-preventable childhood diseases in the United States are at their lowest levels in history that does not mean they have completely disappeared.¹

Many viruses and bacteria are still circulating in this country or are only a plane ride away. In our uber-mobile society, over a million people each day travel to and from other countries where many vaccine-preventable diseases remain relatively common.² That's why it's so important for infants and young children to receive recommended immunizations on time.

How Vaccines Work

Vaccines help make children immune to serious diseases. Immunity is the body's way of preventing disease. Newborn babies are immune to many diseases because of the antibodies they got from their mothers (passed through the placenta before birth). However, this immunity goes away during the first year of life. If an unvaccinated child is exposed to a disease germ, the child's body may not be strong enough to fight the disease.³

When germs enter the body, the immune system recognizes them as foreign substances (antigens). The immune system then produces antibodies to fight the antigens. Vaccines contain weakened or dead versions of the antigens that cause diseases. These antigens won't produce the signs or symptoms of the disease, but they will stimulate the immune system to create antibodies. These antibodies help protect children if they are exposed to the disease in the future.

The Potential for Side Effects

Some vaccines may cause mild temporary side effects such as fever, soreness or a lump under the skin where the shot was given. Such minor symptoms are normal and should be expected as the body builds immunity. Your family doctor will talk to you about possible side effects with certain vaccines.

In some special situations, children shouldn't be vaccinated. For example, some vaccines shouldn't be given to children who have certain types of cancer or certain diseases, or who are taking drugs that lower the body's ability to resist infection.⁴

Vaccine-Preventable Child Diseases

Not that long ago, the following diseases were quite common and could be deadly or disabling for millions of American children.⁶ Today, with our country's high childhood immunization coverage levels, these diseases are now quite uncommon:

- Diphtheria
- Haemophilus influenza type b (Hib)
- Hepatitis A
- Hepatitis B
- Influenza
- Measles
- Meningococcal
- Mumps
- Pertussis (whooping cough)
- Pneumococcal disease
- Polio
- Rotavirus (severe diarrhea)
- Tetanus (lockjaw)
- Varicella (chickenpox)

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Child Is Bullying Others.

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If your child has had a serious reaction to the first shot in a series of shots, your family doctor will probably talk with you about the pros and cons of giving him or her the rest of the shots in the series. Talk to your doctor if you have any questions about whether your child should receive a vaccine.

When To Vaccinate Your Child

Vaccinations usually start when your child is two months old and most are finished by the time he or she is six years old. Children must get at least some vaccines before they may attend school.⁵

As your child gets older and starts to do things like attend summer camp, you should also make sure he or she is up to date on recommended vaccines, including the flu vaccine.

In addition, if you are planning to travel internationally, remember that vaccinations are required for entry into some countries. Before you travel, check the CDC Travelers' Health web site to find out if your destination recommends or requires certain vaccines. Always bring your family's immunization records with you when you travel.

Recommendations about when to have your child vaccinated change over time. You can get a copy of the most current child and adolescent vaccination schedules from the American Academy of Family Physicians, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), or from your family doctor.

Are Vaccines Really Safe?

There has been intense discussion about whether vaccines are safe or harmful, especially for children. Some parents worry that vaccines are not safe and may ask their health care provider to wait. They may even choose not to have their child vaccinated.

However, vaccines have made many serious childhood diseases rare today. The American Academy of Pediatrics, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Institute of Medicine all conclude that the benefits of vaccines far outweigh their risks. Here are some of the reasons why⁷:

1. Vaccines are tested and monitored. Vaccines are tested before being licensed by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Both the CDC and FDA continue to monitor vaccines after they are licensed.
2. Vaccine side effects are usually mild and temporary. The most common side effects include soreness, redness or swelling at the injection site. Severe side effects are rare.
3. Vaccines are one of the safest ways to protect your health. Even people taking prescription medications can be vaccinated.
4. Vaccines can reduce your chance of getting certain diseases. Vaccines work with the body's natural defenses to safely develop immunity to disease and reduce the chances of getting certain diseases and suffering from their complications.

For instance, Hepatitis B vaccine can also reduce the risk of liver cancer. HPV vaccine reduces the risk of cervical cancer.

5. Vaccines reduce your chance of spreading disease. Infants and people with weakened immune systems (like those undergoing cancer treatment) are especially vulnerable to infectious disease. For example, newborns are too young to be vaccinated against whooping cough but it can be very dangerous or even deadly for them.



Resources

www.liveandworkwell.com

To find related information search under the word "vaccines" to link to resources and articles for kids, teens and parents.

Ask your health benefits representative for your access code to liveandworkwell.com.

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1 "Vaccine-Preventable Childhood Diseases," Center for Disease Control (CDC), <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/child-vpd.htm>.

2 Ibid, "Vaccine-Preventable Childhood Diseases."

3 "Why Are Childhood Vaccines So Important?" CDC, <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vac-gen/howvpd.htm#why>.

4 "Childhood Vaccines: What They Are and Why Your Child Needs Them," <http://familydoctor.org/familydoctor/en/kids/vaccines/childhood-vaccines-what-they-are-and-why-your-child-needs-them.printerview.all.html>.

5 Ibid, "Childhood Vaccines."

6 Ibid, "Vaccine-Preventable Childhood Diseases."

7 "Why Vaccines are Important for You," <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/adults/reasons-to-vaccinate.html>.