Infection Prevention and You

Vaccination saves lives

What are vaccine preventable diseases?

Vaccine preventable diseases (VPD) are diseases that are mostly avoidable by immunization. Vaccination is a highly effective method to prevent certain infectious (communicable) diseases. Vaccination has led to significant improvements in child, traveler, and adult health over a short period of time. Many infectious diseases common in prior generations, like polio and measles, are less common today as a result of vaccines. Common VPD include: diphtheria, *Haemophilus influenzae* type b (Hib), hepatitis A and B, human papillomavirus (HPV), influenza (flu), measles, meningococcal infections, mumps, pertussis (whooping cough), pneumococcal Infections, polio, rotavirus, rubella, tetanus, and varicella (chickenpox).

Why is vaccination needed?

Vaccination is needed to protect us as individuals, family members, neighbors, classmates, and our communities. It also protects future generations by stopping the spread of disease. Although vaccines have reduced harmful infectious diseases, the germs that cause VPD still exist and can be spread to people who are not protected by vaccines. Thanks to vaccines, many deadly diseases have become rare in the United States. It is hard to imagine the devastating effects that diseases like polio and measles can have on a family and a community; if we stop vaccinating, these diseases will come back. The National Foundation for Infectious Diseases (NFID) lists 10 reasons to be vaccinated.

Who needs vaccinations?

Almost everyone. Nearly all people need to be vaccinated from birth to childhood to pregnancy, and even throughout one's lifetime--you never outgrow vaccines! Life-protecting vaccinations are recommended on a specific schedule. In fact, everyone over 6 months of age should get a flu vaccine each year. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides vaccine schedules for infants and children; preteens and teens; and adults. There are some cases of people who should not get receive certain vaccines (e.g. the cholera vaccine, adenovirus vaccine, and others) because of age, health conditions, or other factors. CDC provides guidelines on specific cases where people should not get vaccinated or should wait to get vaccinated. The Vaccines for Children program provides vaccinations to children who cannot afford them.

Are vaccines safe?

Yes, vaccines are very safe. Some people may experience minor side effects that go away within a few days. Possible side effects are sore arm, low-grade fever, or redness around the injection site. You should receive a Vaccine Information Statement [VIS] () each time you get a vaccine.

Sometimes the media sends mixed messages on the appropriateness and effectiveness of vaccines, causing confusion. Therefore, it is important to rely on organizations like the CDC and NFID for reliable, evidence-based, accurate information.

Remember:

It is much easier and more cost effective to prevent a disease rather than to treat it—it could even save a life! Not only do vaccinations protect the recipient, they also prevent the disease and illness from spreading to others. Maintaining an ongoing relationship with a medical provider is one of the best ways to ensure that you and your family receive necessary and age-appropriate vaccinations. Your healthcare professional can provide the information you need for the vaccines you are seeking whether you are traveling abroad, preparing to go back to school, or looking for recommended routine vaccines.

The bottom line is that vaccines protect us and our future generations. They have reduced and, in some instances, eliminated the diseases that have caused epidemics and mortality just a few generations ago. Leading medical organizations all support vaccination and tell us that vaccines are safe. Don't leave your healthcare provider's office without making sure you and your loved ones have had all the vaccinations you need.

Some common misconceptions about vaccines are:

#1: "Vaccines cause autism."

According to the CDC, exposure to vaccines that contain thimerosal during pregnancy (prenatally), or as a young child, is not associated with any of the autism spectrum disorder outcomes.

#2: "It is better to space out vaccines using an alternative schedule."

Following an alternative schedule (or spreading out the timing of vaccination) that has not been recommended by your healthcare provider, means increasing the amount of time children are susceptible to the disease. The recommended schedule is based on research that indicates vaccination at certain ages and at specific times for the child's immune system.

#3: "We don't need to vaccinate against rare diseases."

It is because we have vaccines today that these diseases are so rare. However, due to our ability to travel worldwide, these rare and exotic diseases and illnesses can easily be re-introduced into our communities. By keeping our vaccinations up to date, we can significantly decrease our risk of catching and spreading these diseases.

Additional resources:

CDC Vaccines http://www.cdc.gov/vaccinesafety/Vaccines/Index1.html
CDC—Vaccine safety: addressing common concerns http://www.cdc.gov/vaccinesafety/Concerns/Index.html
NFID—Adolescent vaccination http://www.adolescentvaccination.org/
NFID—Adult vaccination http://www.adultvaccination.org/
National Public Health Information Coalition—National Immunization Awareness Month http://www.nphic.org/niam
Immunization Action Coalition—http://www.immunize.org/

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