

Vaccines: What Every Parent Should Know

Healthy Ideas

(NAPS) — Immunizations and vaccines are hot topics in the media recently and parents may have questions about ingredients, timing and more. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) believes that all children should be vaccinated in a timely manner. Vaccines prevent deadly childhood disease, they're safe and children are at risk for potentially fatal illnesses without them. Here are five reasons why vaccines are an important part of your child's health care:

1. Vaccines prevent deadly childhood disease. Polio, whooping cough, meningitis—these diseases once claimed the lives of thousands of children in the U.S. Thanks to the development of vaccines, death rates from these illnesses have dropped dramatically. But in order to keep these rates low, children need to be vaccinated.

2. Vaccines are safe. Vaccines are tested in thousands of people before they are added to the childhood immunization schedule and are continuously monitored for any safety risks. Valid scientific studies have shown no link between thimerosal and autism. This mercury-based preservative was once used in several vaccines (and is still used in some flu vaccine). However, since thimerosal was removed from childhood vaccines in 2001, autism rates have actually increased, supplying further evidence that thimerosal does not cause autism.

3. Deadly diseases are still a threat to children. Deaths due to *Haemophilus influenzae* type b (Hib) in Minnesota and Pennsylvania remind us that vaccine-preventable diseases are still a threat. In addition, the United States has seen increased cases of measles and whooping cough. Outbreaks in unvaccinated communities show that these diseases are still out there and thrive when children aren't fully immunized.



Keeping your infant safe and healthy is an important part of caring for your baby.

4. Multiple vaccines do not overwhelm a child's immune system. Antigens are the substances that create immunity to disease. Improved vaccine development has led to a decrease in the number of antigens in each vaccine. So while there may be more vaccines given than a decade ago, the number of antigens that a child's system must respond to is less than what a single vaccine contained 50 years ago.

5. Staying on schedule is important. Infants are susceptible to infectious diseases. While these diseases could make an older child very sick, they could be deadly for infants. The recommended immunization schedule is designed to work best with a child's immune system—at certain ages and at specific times. If a vaccine requires a second or third dose, they need to be given within a certain time frame or the vaccine will not fully protect your child.

Keeping your infant safe and healthy is an important part of caring for your baby. By giving your child needed vaccinations on a timely basis, you can help your baby get a head start on a healthy future. For more information visit the AAP Web site, www.aap.org