هـيـئـة الصـحـة بدبـي
DUBAI HEALTH AUTHORITY

A Parent's Handbook On Childhood Vaccinations

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Introduction

The health and well-being of our children and community are a priority. One of the most effective ways to protect ourselves from infectious diseases is through vaccination. This guide aims to inform you about the crucial role vaccinations play in safeguarding your child's health and ensuring a safe school and community environment for everyone.

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Why Are Vaccinations Important for Your Child?

Children are exposed to thousands of germs every day, which vaccinations can protect them from.

Vaccinations help your child build their natural defences.

Vaccines protect your child against infectious diseases that can cause severe illness, long-term health complications, and even loss of life.

Even if certain diseases have become uncommon, the germs that cause them continue to circulate in some parts of the world and can easily cross borders through travel.

Benefits of Vaccination:

1. **Saves lives:**
   The WHO estimates that childhood vaccines save over 4 million lives every year.

2. **Protection against disease:**
   Vaccines have been proven to be safe and effective in providing immunity against diseases.

3. **Prevention of outbreaks:**
   When most of the community is vaccinated, the spread of contagious diseases is minimised, reducing the likelihood of outbreaks.

4. **Broader protection:**
   Vaccination helps protect vulnerable groups, such as babies who are not yet vaccinated or individuals unable to be vaccinated due to medical conditions or allergies.

5. **Long-term health:**
   Vaccines protect your child from potential complications associated with certain diseases, such as hearing loss from mumps or birth defects from rubella. They also protect against certain cancers, such as with the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine.

6. **Vaccination may help in eliminating certain infectious diseases.**

7. **Cost-effective:**
   Preventing diseases through vaccines is less expensive than treating the illness itself.

What Do Vaccines Contain?

- **The antigen:** A killed or weakened form of a virus or bacteria, which trains our bodies to recognise and fight it if we encounter it in the future.
- **Adjuvants:** Help to boost our immune response.
- **Stabiliser:** Keeps the vaccine effective during storage.
- **Preservative:** Prevents contamination.
- **Water or saline:** Acts as the liquid carrier to deliver the vaccine safely.

Each of these components is carefully tested for safety before vaccines are approved and used in the community.

Understanding How Vaccines Work

Vaccines work by stimulating your child's immune system to recognise and fight specific germs:

1. **Introduction of antigens:** A weakened or inactivated part of a particular germ (antigen) triggers an immune response without causing the disease.
2. **Immune response:** The immune system responds by creating antibodies, which are proteins that recognise and neutralise the germ.
3. **Immunological memory:** After vaccination, the body remembers the germ. If your child is exposed to it in the future, their immune system can quickly destroy the germ before it causes illness.

What Diseases Do Vaccines Protect Against?

- Cervical cancer
- Cholera
- COVID-19
- Diphtheria
- Ebola virus disease
- Hepatitis B
- Influenza
- Measles
- Meningitis
- Mumps
- Pertussis
- Pneumonia
- Polio
- Rabies
- Rotavirus
- Rubella
- Tetanus
- Typhoid
- Varicella
- Yellow fever

National Immunisation Programme

	At birth	2 months	4 months	6 months	12 months	18 months	5-6 years	13-14 years	15-18 years
BCG	✓								
Hep B	✓	✓	✓	✓					
Hib		✓	✓	✓		✓			
DTap/DTP/Tdap		✓ (DTap)	✓ (DTap)	✓ (DTP)		✓ (DTap)	✓ (DTap)		✓ (Tdap)
OPV/IPV		✓ (IPV)	✓ (IPV)	✓ (OPV)		✓ (IPV+OPV)	✓ (IPV+OPV)		
PCV		✓	✓	✓					
Rota Virus		✓	✓	✓					
MMR					✓	✓			
Varicella					✓		✓		
Meningococcal Vaccine									✓
HPV (1st & 2nd doses)								✓	

How to Prepare Your Child for Vaccinations?

Preparing your child for vaccinations can make the experience smoother and less stressful.
Here are some tips to help you and your child through the process.

Before the Vaccination:

1. **Educate Yourself:**
   Review your child's vaccination schedule and understand the vaccines your child will receive, including their benefits and potential side effects.
   Prepare to bring their immunisation record to the appointment.

2. **Talk to Your Child:**
   Explain what will happen in simple terms appropriate to their age and understanding. For example, you might say, "The nurse will give you some medicine to keep you healthy, and it might feel like a quick pinch."

3. **Prepare a Comfort Plan:**
   Bring their favourite toy or book to the appointment to help them feel secure.
   Teach your child to practice deep, slow breathing during the injection.

4. **Choose the Right Time:**
   Schedule the vaccination appointment for a time when your child is well-rested and fed. A tired or hungry child may be more irritable and anxious. Try to be there if possible.

5. **Avoid giving your child antipyretics before the vaccination.**

How to Prepare Your Child for Vaccinations?

During the Vaccination:

1. **Stay Calm and Positive:**
   Children can pick up on your emotions, so remain calm and positive. Reassure them that everything will be okay.

2. **Use Distraction Techniques:**
   Distract your child's focus by talking about something fun, offering a toy, or showing a video on your phone.

3. **Hold or Sit with Your Child if Possible:**
   Depending on your child's age, you might hold them on your lap or sit close to offer comfort and security.

4. **Practice Deep Breathing:**
   Encourage your child to take slow, deep breaths during the injection.

5. **Offer Praise and Reassurance:**
   Praise your child for being brave and let them know how proud you are of them.

How to Prepare Your Child for Vaccinations?

After the Vaccination:

1. **Comfort Your Child:**
   Give your child lots of hugs and praise after the vaccination. Offer a small treat or engage in their favourite activity (like going out to play) as a reward for their bravery.

2. **Monitor for Side Effects:**
   Most side effects are mild and may include redness or swelling at the injection site, a low-grade fever, or slight fatigue. These symptoms usually resolve on their own within a day or two. Pain relief medication can be used if needed. If side effects persist you may consult your child's doctor.

3. **Encourage Rest and Fluids:**
   This can help them feel better and recover more quickly.

4. **Use a Cool Compress:**
   If the injection site is sore or swollen, apply a cool, damp cloth to the area to reduce discomfort.

5. **Keep the Vaccination Record Updated:**
   Ensure that your child’s immunisation record is updated with the most recent vaccination.

The Role of Parents

As a parent, you play a crucial role in your child's health. Here's how you can ensure they are protected:

Stay Informed:

Keep up-to-date with the recommended vaccination schedule. Your paediatrician is an excellent resource for information and advice.

Keep Records:

Ensure that you have accurate and up-to-date vaccination records for your child.

Communicate with Your School:

Inform the school if your child has received recent vaccinations or if there are any changes in their health that might affect their vaccination status.

Vaccination Booklet:

Submit a copy of the updated vaccination booklet to the school medical team.

The Consequences of Not Vaccinating Your Child

Choosing not to vaccinate can have serious consequences:

- Unvaccinated children are at a higher risk of contracting and spreading infectious diseases.
- Low vaccination rates can lead to the resurgence of diseases that were previously under control, such as measles or whooping cough.

Where Can I Get My Child Vaccinated?

- Local Health Department
- Paediatrician or Family Doctor
- Some schools offer vaccinations during the academic year for students.

FAQ

It's natural to have questions or concerns about vaccinating your child. Here are answers to some of the most common questions parents ask:

Are vaccines safe?

Yes, vaccines undergo rigorous testing and are continually monitored for safety. Remember, you are far more likely to be seriously harmed by a vaccine-preventable disease than by a vaccine.

Are there side effects from vaccines?

Like any medicine, vaccines can cause mild and temporary side effects, such as a low-grade fever, soreness, or redness at the injection site.

Can vaccines cause the diseases they're meant to prevent?

No, vaccines contain inactivated or weakened components that cannot cause the disease.

FAQ

Is there a link between vaccines and autism?

No, there is no evidence of any link between vaccines and autism spectrum disorder (ASD). This has been demonstrated in numerous studies conducted across very large populations.

Do I need to stick to the vaccine schedule?

Yes. The recommended vaccination schedule is designed to balance when a child is likely to be exposed to a disease and when a vaccine will be most effective.

- If we delay vaccination, we increase the risk of serious illness.
- If we wait until we think we may be exposed to a serious illness – such as during a disease outbreak – there may not be enough time for the vaccine to take effect or for all the recommended doses to be administered.
- If your child has missed any recommended vaccinations, speak to your healthcare provider about catching up.

FAQ

Why are so many vaccines needed?

Different vaccines protect against different diseases.

Why are there multiple doses for certain vaccines?

The timing and number of doses are carefully determined to provide the best protection at the appropriate age. Some vaccines may require occasional booster doses to maintain the body's defences.

What about natural immunity?

While natural infection can lead to immunity, it also comes with the risk of severe illness and complications. Vaccination provides immunity without the dangers associated with contracting the disease itself.

It is always better to prevent a disease than to treat one after it occurs. Talk to your healthcare provider and ensure your child is up-to-date with their vaccinations.