Questions Parents Ask About Vaccinations for Babies

Why are vaccinations important?

Vaccinations protect your child against serious diseases by stimulating the immune system to create antibodies against certain bacteria or viruses.

What diseases do vaccines protect against?

Immunizing your baby with vaccines protects against serious diseases like measles, whooping cough, polio, meningococcal disease, tetanus, rotavirus, hepatitis A, hepatitis B, chickenpox, influenza, and more. Vaccines won't protect children from minor illnesses like colds, but they can keep children safe from many serious diseases.

I don't know anybody who has had these diseases. Why does my baby need these vaccines?

While a few of these diseases have virtually disappeared because of vaccination, reported cases of people with diseases like measles and whooping cough have been on the increase lately. Even if some diseases do completely disappear in the U.S., they are common in other parts of the world and are just a plane ride away. If we stop vaccinating against these diseases, many more people will become infected. Vaccinating your child will keep him or her safe.

Are there better ways to protect my baby against these diseases?

No. Breastfeeding offers temporary immunity against some minor infections like colds, but it is not an effective means of protecting a child from the specific diseases prevented by vaccines. Likewise, vitamins won't protect against the bacteria and viruses that cause these serious diseases. Chiropractic remedies, naturopathy, and homeopathy are totally ineffective in preventing vaccine-preventable diseases.

Some parents think that getting the "natural" disease is preferable to "artificial" vaccination, leading to a "natural" immunity. Some even arrange chickenpox "parties" to ensure their child gets infected. It's true that for some diseases, getting infected will lead to immunity, but the price paid for natural disease can include paralysis, brain injury, liver cancer, deafness, blindness, or even death. When you consider the seriousness of these risks, vaccination is definitely the better choice.

Are vaccines safe?

Vaccines are safe, and scientists continually work to make sure they become even safer. Every vaccine undergoes extensive testing before being licensed, and vaccine safety continues to be monitored as long as a vaccine is in use.

Most side effects from vaccination are minor, such as soreness where the injection was given or a low-grade fever. These side effects do not last long and are treatable.

Serious reactions are very rare. The tiny risk of a serious reaction from a vaccination has to be weighed against the very real risk of getting a dangerous vaccine-preventable disease.

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What if my baby has a cold or fever, or is taking antibiotics? Can he or she still get vaccinated?

Yes. Your child can still get vaccinated if he or she has a mild illness, a low-grade fever, or is taking antibiotics. Talk with your child's healthcare provider if you have questions.

How many times do I need to bring my baby in for vaccinations?

At least five visits are needed before age two, but the visits can be timed to coincide with well-child check-ups. Your baby should get the first vaccine (hepatitis B) at birth, while still in the hospital. Multiple visits during the first two years are necessary because there are 14 diseases your baby can be protected against, and most require two or more doses of vaccine for the best protection.

How do I know when to take my baby in for vaccinations?

Your healthcare provider should let you know when the next doses are due. If you are not sure, call your healthcare provider's office to find out when your child should return for vaccinations. Doses cannot be given too close together or immunity doesn't have time to build up. On the other hand, you don't want to delay your child's vaccinations and get behind schedule because during this time, your child remains unprotected against these serious diseases.

What if I miss an appointment? Does my baby have to start the vaccines all over again?

No. If your baby misses some doses, it's not necessary to start over. Your provider will continue from where he or she left off.

How do I keep track of my baby's vaccinations?

In many medical practices, your child's immunization record is entered into an electronic record-keeping system. It's important that you keep home records too, so be sure to ask for a personal record card or a printed copy of your child's vaccinations. If you don't receive it, be sure to ask. Bring your copy of the record to all medical appointments. Whenever your child receives a vaccine, make sure your copy gets updated. Your child will benefit by having an accurate vaccination record throughout his or her life.

What if I can't afford to get my child vaccinated?

Vaccinations are free for children when the get them from The PYT Nursing Program or El Rio. Your child's health depends on timely vaccinations.