



Vaccine Safety: The Facts

Why vaccinate? Vaccines save lives and protect against the spread of disease. If you decide not to immunize your child, you put your child at risk. Your child could catch a disease that is dangerous or deadly. Getting vaccinated is much better than getting the disease.

Your pediatrician knows that you care about your child's health and safety. That's why you need to get all the scientific facts from a medical professional you can trust before making any decisions based on stories you may have seen or heard on TV, the Internet, or from other parents. Your pediatrician cares about your child too and wants you to know that...

- **Vaccines work.** They have kept children healthy and have saved millions of lives for more than 50 years. Most childhood vaccines are 90% to 99% effective in preventing disease. And if a vaccinated child does get the disease, the symptoms are usually less serious than in a child who hasn't been vaccinated. There may be mild side effects, like swelling where the shot was given, but they do not last long. And it is rare for side effects to be serious.
- **Vaccines are safe.** All vaccines must be tested by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The FDA will not let a vaccine be given unless it has been proven to be safe and to work well in children. The data get reviewed again by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American Academy of Family Physicians before a vaccine is officially recommended to be given to children. Also, the FDA monitors where and how vaccines are made. The places where vaccines are made must be licensed. They are regularly inspected and each vaccine lot is safety-tested.
- **Vaccines are necessary.** Your pediatrician believes that your children should receive all recommended childhood vaccines. In the United States vaccines have protected children and continue to protect children from many diseases. However, in many parts of the world many vaccine-preventable diseases are still common. Since diseases may be brought into the United States by Americans who travel abroad or from people visiting areas with current disease outbreaks it's important that your children are vaccinated.

Also, children with certain health problems may not be able to get some vaccines or may need to get them later. Since each child is different, your child's doctor will know what is best for your child. You should get information about each vaccine at the doctor's office. Ask your child's doctor if you don't understand what you've read.



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- **Vaccines are studied.** To make sure the vaccine continues to be safe, the FDA and the CDC created the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS). All doctors must report serious side effects of vaccines to VAERS so they can be studied. Parents can also file reports with VAERS. For more information about VAERS, visit www.vaers.hhs.gov or call the toll-free VAERS information line at 800/822-7967.

Based on VAERS reports, vaccine safety professionals continuously look for any problem with a vaccine, study the problem, and decide what to do. And if there is a problem, changes are made as soon as possible.

For example,

- If a vaccine is no longer safe, it is no longer given.
- If there are new side effects, safety alerts are sent out to your health care providers.

Another way the CDC checks vaccine safety is by studying information about side effects collected from 8 large insurance companies. The Vaccine Safety Datalink (VSD) helps identify if there are any serious problems or safety issues from the records of thousands of children.

In the rare case that a child has serious side effects to a vaccine, parents can contact the National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program (VICP) at 800/338-2382 or www.hrsa.gov/vaccinecompensation. This federal program was created to help pay for the care of people who have been harmed.

Resources

American Academy of Pediatrics

www.aap.org
www.cispimmunize.org

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

www.cdc.gov/vaccines

Food and Drug Administration

www.fda.gov

National Network for Immunization Information

www.immunizationinfo.org

From your doctor

If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to ask your pediatrician.

Please note: Listing of resources does not imply an endorsement by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). The AAP is not responsible for the content of the resources mentioned in this publication. Phone numbers and Web site addresses are as current as possible, but may change at any time.

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.