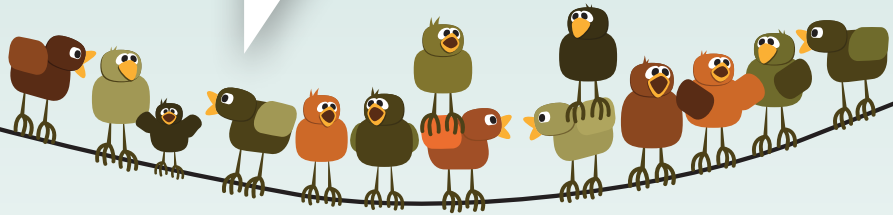




Let's talk
vaccines



A Guide to Conversations About Immunization

Parents ask tough questions. Be their best source for answers.

Ask. Acknowledge. Advise.



Ask.

Offer parents the recommended childhood immunization schedule.

Ask what questions they have about the schedule. Use open-ended questions.

Clarify and restate their concerns to make sure you understand.

Not hesitant
(or planning to follow the recommended schedule)

Acknowledge.

Support parents' decisions to follow the recommended schedule.

"Staying up to date on vaccines is the single most important thing you can do to protect your child from serious disease."

"I think you've made a great decision."

Hesitant

(or wanting to follow an alternative schedule)

Acknowledge.

Emphasize it is the parents' decision.

Applaud them for wanting what is best for their child.

Name the emotions you observe.

Acknowledge risks and conflicting information sources.

Be clear that you are concerned for the health of their child, not just public health safety.

"Many parents have these same questions."

"I know you want to do everything you can to keep your child safe, and so do I."

"I'm here to help you have the information you need to make decisions that work for your family."

"There are a lot of different opinions about vaccines."

Advise.

Encourage parents to get up to date on their own vaccines.

Emphasize the importance of staying on schedule with future vaccinations.

Suggest parents think about whether people who care for their child are up to date on their vaccines.

Advise.

Tailor your advice to parents' specific concern(s) using the Frequently Asked Questions at right.

Offer written resources.

Allow time to discuss the pros and cons of vaccines.

Be willing to discuss parents' ideas.

End with at least one action you both agree on.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the benefits of vaccines?

Vaccines protect against diseases that can harm your child. Some of these diseases can cause serious long-term health problems or death.

Vaccines have saved more lives than any other medical intervention, including antibiotics or surgery. Vaccines also help prevent disabilities such as blindness and paralysis that can be caused by disease.

What are the risks of vaccines?

Vaccines can cause mild side effects that usually appear within a couple days. The most common are fever or soreness where the injection was given.

Serious side effects from vaccines are extremely rare. For example, one child in a million may have a severe allergic reaction to the DTaP vaccine. There is no evidence that vaccines are linked to chronic diseases such as autism, autoimmune disease, asthma, or diabetes.

The benefits of vaccines far outweigh the risks.

Haven't we gotten rid of these diseases in the U.S.?

No. The vaccines we recommend are for diseases that still show up in the U.S., so children are still at risk. You may have heard about whooping cough (pertussis) becoming more common in the Northwest—there were more than 4,000 cases in Washington and Oregon between 2004 and 2007. Other diseases may be just a plane ride away.

Will my child be exposed to toxins from these vaccines?

No. Vaccines do contain some additives. Vaccines today contain fewer additives than the ones you may have had as a child. But some additives are necessary for vaccines to be safe and effective.

Aluminum is present in some vaccines to improve immune response. However, healthy babies quickly eliminate aluminum from their bodies. In fact, babies get more aluminum from breast milk or formula in their first six months of life than they do from vaccines.

The influenza vaccine—or “flu shot”—is the only childhood vaccine that contains the mercury-based preservative thimerosal. But our best evidence clearly shows that thimerosal in vaccines does not cause autism or other harmful effects. The form of mercury known to be dangerous to health has never been in any vaccines.

Why does my child need all these vaccines at such a young age? Is it safer to delay some shots?

The vaccines we offer to young babies are for diseases that are especially dangerous to them. These diseases can have devastating long-term effects on your baby's health.

It is actually more dangerous to delay vaccines than to give them. This is because the diseases that vaccines prevent are more severe than any side effects. Most of the time, young babies are exposed to these diseases from people around them every day, such as brothers, sisters, parents, and other family members and caregivers.

Isn't this too many shots at one visit?

There is no evidence that getting more than one vaccine at the same time will harm your child. Newborn babies successfully respond to many more new substances every day than are in the vaccines we recommend. The human immune system can recognize and respond to thousands of organisms in the body at the same time. This is true even for newborn babies.

Your choice to stick to the recommended vaccine schedule actually makes your child's immune system stronger.

Can I separate the MMR vaccine into individual shots?

Separate MMR shots are not available in the U.S. But that's a good thing. When the MMR was given separately, there were gaps of time when children were still vulnerable to the serious diseases the MMR prevents: measles, mumps, and rubella.

We use the combination MMR because we know it is safe—and because it protects against three diseases in only one shot. That's less discomfort for your child.

Can I use an alternative schedule?

The evidence suggests that there is no benefit to delaying vaccines. In fact, it actually places your child at risk for getting a disease that vaccines could otherwise prevent.

There is flexibility within the recommended schedule. Let's look over it together and come up with a plan that you're comfortable with.

For more resources visit
vaxnorthwest.org

Made possible (in part) by a grant from the Group Health Foundation.

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