Protecting Children from Preventable Disease

Vaccines can guard children against diseases. Here are some answers to questions that Illinois parents often ask about immunizations.

Why do children need immunizations?

- The viruses and bacteria that cause illness still exist. They can be carried to any community. Every year they cause outbreaks of childhood illnesses.
- Vaccines help prevent specific diseases. Some of these diseases can be fatal or cause permanent damage to a child. These include diphtheria and polio. Other diseases may affect some children more severely than others. A mumps infection may be mild or leave a child deaf. A case of measles can cause a rash or lead to brain swelling.
- Immunizing babies may lower their risk of SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome).
- Illinois laws require vaccinations before children can enter childcare or school.
- When most people are immune to a disease, it cannot spread easily. This helps to protect children who are too ill or too young to be vaccinated.

Can vaccines harm my child?

- Vaccines are much safer than the diseases they prevent. They are widely tested. A vaccine is monitored for safety as long as it is being used.
- Talk to your health care provider before your child is vaccinated. Tell her if your child is ill, has allergies, or has had a bad reaction to any vaccines or medicines.
- Any medicine can cause side effects. The injection site may be sore. Your child may have a mild fever. Only a few out of a million shots cause a severe reaction.
- Extensive scientific research has found no connection between vaccines and autism.

Who decides on the immunization schedule?

- Doctors and disease experts design a schedule based on recent research.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the American Academy of Family Physicians approve the schedule.
- Your child's doctor should recommend the best schedule for your child.

Is it okay for an infant or small child to get so many immunizations?

- Vaccines use very small amounts of antigens to help your child's immune system recognize and learn to fight serious diseases. Antigens are parts of germs that cause the body's immune system to go to work.
- According to the CDC, vaccines in the 1990s used 3,000 antigens to protect against eight diseases by age 2. Today, vaccines use 305 antigens to protect against 14 diseases by age 2. Thanks to advances in science, today's vaccines can protect children from more diseases using fewer antigens.
- Vaccines contain only a fraction of the antigens that babies encounter in their daily life.
- A healthy child is well able to handle several vaccines over a short time.
- Postponing vaccinations leaves a child unprotected against serious or fatal illnesses.

The opinions, resources, and referrals provided in this tip sheet are intended for information purposes only and should not be considered or used as a substitute for medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. We advise parents to seek the advice of a physician or other qualified health care provider with questions regarding their child's health or medical conditions.

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this tip sheet are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois State Board of Education.

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