



Why Immunization of Children Is So Important

There are many things that you, as a parent, can do to ensure the health of your child and protect your child from harm. Making sure your child is up to date on their immunizations is one of the most important.

Why vaccinate? Vaccines protect your child from serious, often deadly, diseases. Before the days of immunizations, diseases such as smallpox, polio, diphtheria, whooping cough, measles, mumps, rubella and chickenpox were serious health threats. Many children were quarantined, hospitalized, paralyzed or died because of these diseases. With the advent of vaccines, these diseases became either extinct or rare in the US. Unfortunately, because fewer children are being immunized, many of these diseases are returning again.

“Vaccine-preventable diseases are still a threat to our children, as we have seen recently from news stories of outbreaks,” says Richard Van Enk, Ph.D, director of infection prevention and epidemiology at Bronson Healthcare. “The only way to reliably protect children against these diseases is vaccines.”

What happens if children aren't vaccinated? If children are not up to date on their immunizations, they can easily get those diseases if they are exposed. Many of those diseases are still carried by people who do not appear sick, and they can expose other children. For some of those diseases, there is no specific treatment. The patient may be sick at home or in the hospital for weeks. Some diseases leave permanent damage to the patient, and some can be fatal.

What are the side effects of vaccines? Some children may notice some side effects after receiving a vaccination. The most common side effects are a mild fever or soreness at the injection site if the vaccine is given as a shot.

“All vaccine side effects are manageable and actually indicate that the vaccine is working and the immune system is being stimulated,” explains Van Enk.

What about flu shots? Most immunizations are given as one series that is completed and gives lasting protection. Influenza is different because it needs to be given every year. Infants as young as six months of age should receive the flu vaccine annually, beginning in October.

For more information on vaccinations, including a schedule of recommended vaccines by age, visit the American Academy of Pediatrics website at www.aap.org.

This article is brought to you by Bronson Children's Hospital, southwest Michigan's only children's hospital. For more information about children's health, visit bronsonhealth.com/children