

## Immunizing your Child: What you need to know

### What is Immunization?

Immunization is considered to be one of the miracles of modern day health care. Immunization is a simple, safe, and effective way to protect your child – and those around them – from twelve disabling diseases. Immunization may also be called vaccination, baby shots, or needles, and are given on schedule, starting at 2 months. Vaccines trigger your child's own immune system to make antibodies to fight diseases. It is an ounce of prevention that provides a world of protection.

### Why is it so important to have my child immunized?

Thanks to immunization, many of these diseases no longer pose the threat they once did. Polio, whooping cough (pertussis), measles, mumps, meningitis are just some of the diseases that can cause lifelong disability and even death – diseases that can be prevented by immunization.

### Why is timing important?

Juggling schedules is never easy, but this is one appointment to keep. Having your child immunized on schedule provides the best immune response. Each shot, starting at 2 months is part of a series given at 2, 4, 6, 12, and 18 months of age and again before starting school. The most commonly forgotten shot is at 18 months of age.

### If most of these diseases are almost eliminated in Canada, why do we still have to immunize?

Yes, we have made great strides in Canada to *almost* eliminate diseases like polio, measles, and whooping cough, but the truth is these diseases still exist in other parts of the world. With airline travel today, travellers can unknowingly carry a disease back with them, and begin the spread of disease here in Canada. Without immunization, our children are unprotected. Experience from other countries tells us we need to be vigilant in keeping our children protected through immunization. For example, in Britain, Sweden, and Japan, the years where immunization levels dropped were sadly followed by years of increased epidemic of preventable disease and deaths.

### Will it hurt my child?

We know it hurts to see your child cry after a needle, and our staff will do everything they can to provide a warm and caring environment. For the most part, the effect is short lived, and far outweighs the risks of not immunizing.

### **What about the risk of side effects?**

Often we hear more about a rare event rather than the millions of cases that have been prevented by immunization. The risk from the side effects of the vaccine is much less when compared to the risk of not immunizing. For example, 1 in 10 unvaccinated children who get the mumps can get meningitis, a serious disease that can cause permanent brain damage. Yet only 1 in 800,000 of children who are vaccinated are at risk for meningitis – a substantial difference. It's a bit like wearing your seat belt for protection. We know that our chances of being hurt in a crash are drastically reduced when we buckle up, than when we don't. Side effects are very rare and if you have any concerns, be sure to discuss this with your Public Health nurse or family physician.

### **Is there any link to autism or other disorders?**

No. Vaccines are safe. The best available science has shown that there are no links between autism and other disorders. This research is backed by other health organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO), Health Canada, the US Food and Drug Administration, the Canadian Pediatric Society, and the US Institute of Medicine.

### **Where can I find out more information?**

We recognize that the decision to immunize is a very important and personal one. That's why we offer these other sources of information that can help you make an informed decision to protect your child and those around them.

- Call your local Public Health office and speak to one of our Public Health nurses
- Talk to your family physician
- Get more information online at these well known sites:
  - [www.immunize.cpha.ca](http://www.immunize.cpha.ca) (Canadian Coalition for Immunization Awareness & Promotion)
  - [www.who.int/vaccines](http://www.who.int/vaccines) (World Health Organization)
  - [www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles](http://www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles) (British Columbia Ministry of Health Services)
  - [www.caringforkids.cps.ca](http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca) (Canadian Pediatric Society)
  - [www.interiorhealth.ca](http://www.interiorhealth.ca) (Interior Health) (See Immunizations and download "Childhood Vaccines: Questions and Answers. Best advice from the Public Health Nurses of British Columbia".