



COLORADO ACADEMY OF FAMILY PHYSICIANS

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Myths & Facts: VACCINES

Vaccines are a high topic of interest to parents today. Separating myth from fact is very important and medical evidence disputes many common, dangerous misconceptions.

MYTH: Vaccines don't work.

FACT: Vaccines, after sanitation, may be the most effective public health intervention in history. Not only do vaccines work, they work phenomenally well and they save lives.

Before vaccines, each year in the United States:

- Polio would paralyze 10,000 children
- Rubella (German measles) would cause birth defects and mental retardation in as many as 20,000 newborn infants
- Measles would infect about four million children, killing 3,000
- Diphtheria would be one of the most common causes of death in school-aged children.
- Pertussis (whooping cough) would kill thousands of infants
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MYTH: Vaccines aren't necessary.

FACT: There are still critical reasons for immunizations. Some diseases, such as chicken pox are still so prevalent in the U.S. that a decision not to be immunized essentially guarantees that a person will get the disease. Diseases such as measles, mumps, German measles and pertussis continue to occur, but at fairly low levels. When immunization rates drop, outbreaks recur. Some diseases, such as measles, polio and diphtheria have been virtually eliminated from the U.S., but outbreaks of these diseases still occur in other countries. Given the high rate of international travel, travelers and immigrants can easily import these diseases.

MYTH: Vaccines are unsafe.

FACT: All recommended vaccines are extraordinarily safe. When you consider that the 3.5 to four million children born every year in the United States received more than 20 different vaccines to protect them from at least 11 different preventable diseases by the time they are six years old, it is clear that the record of vaccine safety in the U.S. is remarkable. Vaccine side effects are usually limited to pain and tenderness where the injection is given or to a low-grade fever.

MYTH: It's better to be naturally infected than immunized.

FACT: It is true that natural infections usually cause better immunity than vaccination. Natural infection causes immunity after just one infection, but vaccines usually create immunity only after several doses over a period of time. Therefore, many vaccines require more than one injection. The difference lies in the price paid for immunity. The price paid for vaccination is the cost of the vaccine, the inconvenience of several shots and an occasional sore injection site. The price paid for a single natural infection may be paralysis from natural polio infection; mental retardation or hearing difficulties from natural Hib infection

(Hemophilus influenzae type B); liver failure or death from natural hepatitis B infection; or deafness from natural mumps infection. Most parents are not willing to take these risks once they understand them.

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This information is provided as a public service by the Colorado Academy of Family Physicians. For information about vaccinations and 2012 recommended immunization schedules, visit the American Academy of Family Physicians consumer website at www.familydoctor.org.