



COUNTY HEALTH MATTERS

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Are your children protected?

By Lisa Graham

Newborn babies are protected against many diseases because they have some immunity passed on from their mothers. However, the duration of this immunity may last only a month to about a year. After a while the child's immunity wanes leaving the child vulnerable to vaccine-preventable diseases, such as whooping cough. If a child is not vaccinated and is exposed to a disease germ, the child's body may not be strong enough to fight the disease.

Before vaccines, many children died from diseases that vaccines now prevent, such as whooping cough, measles, and polio. Those same germs still exist, but babies are now protected by vaccines, so we don't see the diseases very often.

There are 12 potentially serious diseases that vaccines protect against: Measles, Mumps, Rubella (German Measles), Diphtheria, Tetanus (lockjaw), Pertussis (Whooping Cough), Polio, Haemophilus Influenzae type b (Hib Disease), Hepatitis B, Varicella (Chickenpox), Hepatitis A (selected populations only), and Pneumococcal disease. At least one shot is needed for each of these diseases, and for some of them several doses are required for the best protection.

Without immunizations your child is at greater risk of catching one of these vaccine-preventable diseases. Children who are not immunized can also transmit the disease throughout the community. Some of the diseases are becoming very rare in the United States due to vaccinations. If we stopped vaccinating, before long we would see epidemics of diseases that are nearly under control today.

Persons who choose not to immunize need to be aware of the risk not only to their children but also to others who may come into contact with them. One out of 30 children with measles get pneumonia. For every 1,000 children who get the disease, one or two will die from it. Thanks to vaccines, we have few cases of measles in the United States today. However, the disease is extremely contagious and each year dozens of cases are imported from abroad into the U.S., threatening the health of people who have not been vaccinated. Other risks include meningitis (swelling of the lining of the brain) caused by Hib, bloodstream infections caused by pneumococcus, deafness caused by mumps, and liver cancer caused by hepatitis B virus.

Vaccines are held to the highest standard of safety. The United States currently has the safest, most effective vaccine supply in history. Before vaccines are licensed, the FDA requires they be extensively tested to ensure safety.

Some children should get their first shot (Hepatitis B) before leaving the hospital after birth. Others begin at 2 months of age. You will have to return for shots several more times before the child starts school. Check with your doctor or local health department for a schedule.

It is important to keep accurate up-to-date records of all your child's immunizations. A vaccination health record helps you and your health care provider keep your child's vaccinations on schedule. If you move or change providers, having an accurate record might prevent your child from repeating vaccinations he or she has already had. A shot record should be started when your child receives his/her first vaccination and updated with each vaccination visit.

All childhood immunizations are offered through the Warren County Health Department. For more information contact your doctor or call us at 636-456-7474. You can also view the 2004 Recommended Childhood and Adolescent Immunization Schedule on our website at <http://warren.lphamo.org>.