

Common Myths and Facts About Immunizations

Myth

Fact

Immunizations aren't necessary

Childhood Immunizations offer protection from a variety of serious or potentially fatal diseases, including diphtheria, measles, meningitis, polio, tetanus and whooping cough. If these diseases seem uncommon – or even unheard of – it simply means that immunizations are doing their job. If immunization rates drop, immunization-preventable diseases may once again become common threats.

Immunization side effects are dangerous

Any immunization can cause side effects. Usually, these side effects are minor – low grade fever, and soreness, redness or swelling at the injection site. Some immunizations cause temporary headache, dizziness, fatigue or loss of appetite. Rarely, a child may experience a severe allergic reaction or a neurological side effect, such as a seizure. Although these rare side effects are a concern, immunizations are much safer than the diseases they prevent.

I've read that they put mercury or something called thimerosal in immunizations.

Thimerosal is a mercury-containing preservative that had been used in some immunizations and other products since the 1930s. There is no convincing scientific evidence of harm caused by the low doses of thimerosal in immunizations, except for minor reactions like redness and swelling at the injection site. However, in July 1999 the American Academy of Pediatrics and immunization manufacturers agreed that thimerosal should be reduced or eliminated in immunizations as a precautionary measure. Since 2001, with the exception of some influenza (flu) vaccines, thimerosal is not used as a preservative in routinely recommended childhood immunizations.

Myth**Fact**

Immunizations cause autism

Despite much controversy on the topic, researchers have not found a clear connection between autism and childhood immunizations. Although signs of autism may appear at about the same time children receive certain immunizations – such as the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) immunization – there is no direct connection.

I read about a delayed immunization schedule and how spreading immunizations out over a longer period of time is safer.

First, you would not want your child to go unprotected that long. Second, the recommended schedule is designed to work best with a child's immune system at certain ages and at specific times. There is no research to show that a child would be equally protected against diseases with a very different schedule. If many parents in any community decide to follow such a schedule, diseases will be able to spread much more quickly. Also, there is no scientific reason why spreading out the shots would be safer. But we do know that any length of time without immunizations is a time without protection.

These diseases have been virtually eliminated from the United States, so my child doesn't need to be immunized.

Without immunizations at the right times, your child can still catch infectious diseases that may cause high fever, coughing, choking, breathing problems and even brain injury. These illnesses may leave your child deaf or blind or cause paralysis. Immunizations have reduced most of these diseases to very low levels in the United States. However, some of these diseases are still common in other parts of the world. Travelers can bring these diseases into this country. Without immunizations, these infections could quickly spread here. Immunizations also help people who cannot be vaccinated or who do not respond to immunizations. They can only hope the people around them are immunized.

References

American Academy of Pediatrics

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention