



VACCINE SAFETY: COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

WHAT PARENTS NEED TO KNOW

Most parents today have never seen a case of diphtheria, measles, or other once-common diseases now preventable by vaccines. As a result, some parents wonder why their children must receive immunizations for diseases that do not seem to exist. Myths and misinformation about vaccine safety can confuse parents who are trying to make sound decisions about their children's health care. This information outlines some of the common misconceptions about immunizations.

Misconception #1: Diseases are rare now. Immunizations are not really necessary.

Certain diseases are rare in the United States because of vaccines, but are much more common in other parts of the world. Because of travel and immigration, many diseases once controlled in the United States are re-emerging. If we stopped using vaccines, diseases would spread very quickly – and many children could become very ill.

Individuals should be immunized for two reasons. The first is to protect themselves. Even if we think our chances of getting any of these vaccine-preventable diseases are small, the diseases still exist and can still infect anyone who is not protected.

The second reason to get immunized is to protect those around us. There is a small number of people who cannot be immunized (because of severe allergies to vaccine components) and a small percentage of people who do not respond to vaccines. These people are susceptible to disease, and their only hope of protection is that people around them are immune and cannot pass diseases on to them.

Misconception #2: My child cannot receive immunizations if she has a cold, fever or is taking antibiotics. Children can still be immunized if he or she has a mild illness, a low-grade fever or is taking antibiotics.

Misconception #3: The majority of people who get these diseases have been immunized.

Most routine childhood vaccines are effective for 85% to 95% of recipients. In order to make vaccines safer than the disease, the bacteria or virus is killed or weakened. Some immunized individuals do not develop immunity because of reasons specific to the individual (e.g. those individuals with a genetic pre-disposition that precludes their ability to develop an immune response).



Misconception #4: Immunizations cause harmful side effects and illnesses.

Vaccines cause Autism.

Severe side effects from vaccines are very rare (less than 1%). It is a much greater health risk to not get immunized. Some children may have mild side effects, such as crankiness, soreness or a slight fever that usually only lasts a few hours. However, getting the disease can be far more dangerous and painful.

There is no known connection between immunizations and Autism. In some children, signs of Autism have appeared around the time routine immunizations are given. Research has not shown immunizations to be a cause of Autism.

Misconception #5: It's dangerous to give so many vaccines at the same.

Studies show that giving several vaccines at one visit is safe and effective.

A number of studies have been conducted to examine the effects of giving various combinations of vaccines at the same time. These studies have shown that the recommended vaccines are as effective in combination as they are individually. Combination vaccines carry no greater risk for adverse side effects.

There are two reasons for giving a child several immunizations during the same visit. First, children should be immunized as early as possible to give them protection during the vulnerable early months of their lives. This generally means giving inactivated vaccines beginning at two months and live vaccines at 12 months. That means various vaccine doses tend to be due at the same time. Second, giving several immunizations at the same time will mean fewer office visits for immunizations, which saves parents time and money and results in less stress for the child.

For additional information relating to vaccine safety, visit the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services' web site at <http://health.mo.gov/immunizations>.

