

Why Immunizations?

Immunization has been called the most important public health intervention in history, after safe drinking water. It has saved millions of lives over the years and prevented hundreds of millions of cases of disease.

None of us wants to see our children get sick. And getting them immunized can protect them from a number of very serious diseases.

But did you know that getting your children immunized...

- Can also protect their friends, schoolmates, and others from those same diseases? *Some children can't get certain vaccines for medical reasons, or some children are not able to respond to certain vaccines. For these children, the immunity of people around them is their only protection.*
- Can help protect your grandchildren, their grandchildren, and future generations from diseases? *If enough parents fail to get their children immunized, diseases that had been under control can come back to cause epidemics. This has happened in several countries.*
- Could, ultimately, even help rid the world of diseases that have been crippling and killing children for centuries? *Immunization allowed us eradicate smallpox. Today polio is nearly gone, and in the future measles and other diseases will follow.*

Vaccines have a remarkable track record. For example...

- Diphtheria used to be one of the most dreaded of childhood diseases, killing over 10,000 people a year in the United States. After we started vaccinating children in the 1930s and 1940s the disease began to disappear. Today most doctors will never see a single case of diphtheria, much less have a child die from it.
- In 1962, the year before measles vaccine was introduced, almost 500,000 cases of measles were reported in the United States, and many more cases went unreported. Ten years later there were about 32,000 cases and 10 years after that fewer than 2,000. 2002 and 2003 **combined** saw only 100 cases.

- Parents in the 1950s were terrified as polio paralyzed children by the thousands. Then we learned how to prevent polio using the Salk and Sabin vaccines. There has not been a case of wild virus polio in the United States since 1979.
- Smallpox was one of the most devastating diseases the world has ever known. It killed millions of people every year. In 1967 the World Health Organization undertook an intensive, worldwide vaccination campaign. Twelve years later the disease had ceased to exist. There hasn't been a single case since. Smallpox is the first, and so far the only, disease we have ever eradicated from the Earth; and it was thanks to vaccination.
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