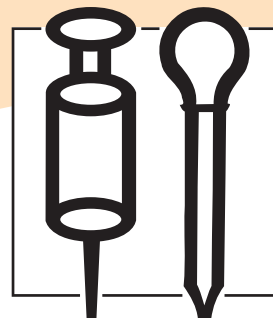




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**Why it is important to share
and act on information
about**



Immunization

Each year, 1.7 million children die from diseases that could have been prevented with readily available vaccines. Children who are immunized are protected from these dangerous diseases, which often lead to disability or death. All children have the right to this protection.

Every girl and boy needs to be immunized. And pregnant women need to be immunized to protect themselves and their infants from tetanus.

It is essential that all parents know why, when, where and how many times the child should be immunized. Parents also need to know that it is safe to immunize the child even if the child has an illness or a disability or is suffering from malnutrition.



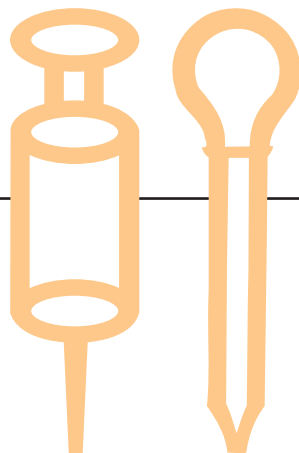
Key Messages:

What every family and community has a right to know about

Immunization

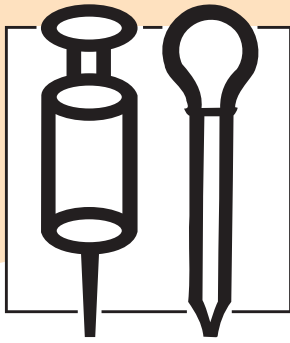
1. Immunization is urgent. Every child needs a series of immunizations during the first year of life.
2. Immunization protects against several dangerous diseases. A child who is not immunized is more likely to suffer illness, become permanently disabled or become undernourished and die.
3. It is safe to immunize a child who has a minor illness, a disability or who is malnourished.





4. All pregnant women need to be protected against tetanus. Even if the woman was immunized earlier, she may need additional tetanus toxoid vaccinations. Check with a health worker for advice and tetanus toxoid immunization.
5. A new or sterile needle and syringe must be used for every person being immunized. People should insist on this.
6. Disease can spread quickly when people are crowded together. All children living in congested conditions, particularly in refugee or disaster situations, should be immunized immediately, especially against measles.





Supporting Information

Immunization

1. Immunization is urgent. Every child needs a series of immunizations during the first year of life.

Children must be immunized early in life. Half of all deaths from whooping cough, a third of all cases of polio and a quarter of all deaths from measles occur in children under one year old.

It is essential that infants complete the *full* number of immunizations – otherwise the vaccines may not work.

To protect the child during the first year of life, the immunizations in the chart on page 69 are necessary. The immunizations are most effective if they are given at the ages specified, or as close to those ages as possible.

If for any reason a child has not had the full series of immunizations in the first year of life, it is extremely important to have the child fully immunized as soon as possible or during special National Immunization Days.

In some countries, additional vaccine doses, called 'booster shots', are offered after the first year of life. These shots make the vaccine protection even more effective.



Immunization schedule for infants*

Age	Immunizations to be given
At birth	BCG**, polio and, in some countries, hepatitis B
6 weeks	DPT**, polio and, in some countries, hepatitis B and Hib
10 weeks	DPT, polio and, in some countries, hepatitis B and Hib
14 weeks	DPT, polio and, in some countries, hepatitis B and Hib
9 months	Measles (12-15 months in industrialized countries) and, in some countries, yellow fever, mumps and rubella

*National immunization schedules may differ slightly from country to country.

**BCG offers partial protection against some forms of tuberculosis and leprosy; DPT protects against diphtheria, pertussis (whooping cough) and tetanus.

2. Immunization protects against several dangerous diseases. A child who is not immunized is more likely to suffer illness, become permanently disabled or become undernourished and die.

Immunization protects children against some of the most dangerous diseases of childhood. All children, including those who are disabled, need to be vaccinated. A child is immunized by vaccines, which are injected or given by mouth. The vaccines work by building up the child's defences against disease. Immunization only works if given *before* the disease strikes.

A child who is not immunized is very likely to get measles, whooping cough and other diseases that can kill. Children who survive these diseases are weakened and may not grow well or may be permanently disabled. They may die later from malnutrition and other illnesses.



All children need to be immunized against measles, which is a major cause of malnutrition, poor mental development, and hearing and visual impairments. The signs that a child has measles are a fever and rash that have lasted for three days or more, together with a cough, a runny nose or red eyes. Measles can cause death.

All children, everywhere, need to be immunized against polio. The signs of polio are a floppy limb or the inability to move. For every 200 children who are infected, one will be disabled for life.

Tetanus bacteria or spores, which grow in dirty cuts, can be deadly without a tetanus immunization.

- Immunizing a woman with at least two doses of tetanus toxoid before or during pregnancy protects not only the woman but also her newborn for the first weeks of the baby's life.
- At six weeks of age, the baby needs the first dose of DPT to extend the protection against tetanus.

In countries where hepatitis B is a problem, up to 10 out of every 100 children will harbour the infection for life if they are not immunized. Children who are infected with hepatitis B are likely to develop liver cancer when they are older.

In some countries, epidemics of yellow fever put many young children's lives at risk. Vaccination can prevent the disease.

In many countries, pneumonia caused by the *Haemophilus influenzae* type B (Hib) germ kills many young children. The Hib germ can also cause childhood meningitis. This germ is one of the most dangerous for children, particularly for those under five. Hib immunization can prevent these deaths.



Breastmilk and colostrum, the thick yellow milk produced during the first few days after birth, provide protection against pneumonia, diarrhoea and other diseases. Protection lasts for as long as the child is breastfed.

Vitamin A helps children fight infections and prevents blindness. Vitamin A is found in breastmilk, liver, fish, dairy products, some orange and yellow fruits and vegetables, and some green leafy vegetables. In areas of vitamin A deficiency, children aged six months and older should be given vitamin A capsules or liquid when they are immunized or during National Immunization Days. Vitamin A is also an important part of measles treatment.

3. It is safe to immunize a child who has a minor illness, a disability or who is malnourished.

One of the main reasons why parents do not bring a child for immunization is that the child has a fever, a cough, a cold, diarrhoea or some other illness on the day the child is to be immunized. However, it is safe to immunize a child who has a minor illness.

Sometimes a health worker advises against immunizing a child who has a disability or is malnourished. *This is wrong advice.* It is safe to immunize children who are disabled or malnourished.

After an injection, the child may cry or develop a fever, a minor rash or a small sore. This is normal. Breastfeed frequently or give the child plenty of liquids and foods. If the child has a high fever, the child should be taken to a health centre.

Because measles can be extremely dangerous for malnourished children, they should be immunized against measles, especially if the malnutrition is severe.



4. All pregnant women need to be protected against tetanus. Even if the woman was immunized earlier, she may need additional tetanus toxoid vaccinations. Check with a health worker for advice and tetanus toxoid immunization.

In many parts of the world, mothers give birth in unhygienic conditions. This puts both mother and child at risk of getting tetanus, a major killer of newborn infants.

If a pregnant woman is not immunized against tetanus and tetanus bacteria or spores enter her body, her life will also be at risk.

Tetanus bacteria or spores grow in dirty cuts. These germs can grow if the umbilical cord is cut with an unclean knife or if anything unclean touches the end of the cord. Any tool used to cut the cord should first be cleaned and then boiled or heated over a flame and allowed to cool. For the first week after birth, the baby's umbilical cord must be kept clean.

All pregnant women should check to make sure they have been immunized against tetanus. This protects both mothers and their newborn babies.

It is safe for a pregnant woman to be immunized against tetanus. She should be immunized according to this schedule:

First dose: As soon as she knows she is pregnant.

Second dose: One month after the first dose, and no later than two weeks before her due date.

Third dose: Six to 12 months after the second dose, or during the next pregnancy.

Fourth dose: One year after the third dose, or during a subsequent pregnancy.

Fifth dose: One year after the fourth dose, or during a subsequent pregnancy.

If a girl or a woman has been vaccinated with five properly spaced doses, she is protected for her lifetime. Her children are also protected for the first few weeks of life.



5. A new or sterile needle and syringe must be used for every person being immunized. People should insist on this.

Needles and equipment that are not properly sterilized can cause life-threatening disease. Sharing of syringes and needles, even among family members, can spread life-threatening disease. Only new or sterile needles and syringes should be used.

6. Disease can spread quickly when people are crowded together. All children living in congested conditions, particularly in refugee or disaster situations, should be immunized immediately, especially against measles.

Emergencies and situations that make people flee their homes often lead to the spread of communicable diseases. Therefore, all displaced children under 12 years of age should be immediately immunized, especially for measles, at the first point of contact or settlement.

All immunizations in emergency settings should be given with auto-disable syringes – syringes that can be used only once.

Measles is even more serious when children are malnourished or living in conditions of poor sanitation.

- As diseases like measles spread very quickly, a child with measles needs to be isolated from other children and examined by a trained health worker.
- Measles frequently causes severe diarrhoea. Immunizing children against measles prevents diarrhoea.

If routine child immunization has been disrupted, consult a health worker to complete the immunizations according to national guidelines.

