

## **One of the Most Important Things You Can Do for Your Child: Get Them Vaccinated!**

Every Spring, National Infant Immunization Week is observed to promote the benefits of childhood immunization. This year, it will be held April 23-30.

Since NIIW was established in 1994, communities throughout the United States have sponsored events for parents, guardians and care providers to support proper infant immunization. Early vaccination is encouraged against 14 vaccine-preventable diseases, including:

- Bacterial meningitis
- Diphtheria
- Hepatitis A and B
- Influenza
- Rubeola (red measles)
- Mumps
- Pertussis (whooping cough)
- Pneumococcal disease
- Polio
- Rubella (German measles)
- Tetanus (lockjaw)
- Rotavirus
- Varicella (chickenpox).

“Immunization is a means of creating immunity to certain diseases by using small amounts of a killed or weakened microorganism that causes the particular disease,” says Amy Hackman, FNP at Sturgis Pediatrics. “Microorganisms can be viruses, like the measles virus, or they can be bacteria, like pneumococcus. Vaccines stimulate the immune system to react as if there was a real infection. The immune system fights off the ‘infection’ and remembers the organism so that it can fight it quickly should it ever enter the body again.”

While some may question the need for vaccination against diseases that are rare in the United States, ensuring that your child is vaccinated is critical as, although uncommon, many of these diseases can lead to severe illness and, even, death. Additionally, without continued nationwide infant immunization, there is an increased risk that one of these diseases could, once again, become epidemic.

A common concern about immunization is the association of infant vaccination with autism. A clinical study connecting the two received considerable international attention a couple of years ago, but has, more recently, been proven false and retracted.

Another concern about immunization is that children will have serious reactions to a vaccine or possibly acquire the illness the vaccine is supposed to prevent.

“Because the components of vaccines are weakened or killed, and, in some cases, only

parts of the microorganism are used, vaccines are unlikely to cause serious illness,” says Hackman. “Some vaccines may cause mild reactions, but serious reactions are rare.”

Common reactions to vaccines include:

- Fever
- Rash
- Swelling and/or tenderness at the injection site
- Vomiting

“According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more severe reactions, including severe allergic reaction and seizures, are possible, but rare and occur in fewer than one of one million doses,” says QHR Clinical Operations Practice Leader Beth Buckley.

The CDC offers this timeline for getting your children immunized:

- The **Hepatitis B** vaccine should be administered to all newborns before being discharged from the hospital. After the first dose, a second vaccine should be given at one or two months of age.
- The first dose of the **Rotavirus** vaccine should be given between the ages of six weeks and 14 weeks. The vaccine series should not be initiated if your child has reached 15 weeks and, according to the CDC, the maximum age for the final dose is eight months.
- The **Diphtheria and Tetanus Toxoids and Acellular Pertussis (DTaP)** vaccine shouldn't be given before the age of six weeks. The final dose to complete the series should be given between the ages of four and six years.
- There are two types of **Pneumococcal** vaccine. The minimum age for the pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PVC) is six weeks; this type is recommended for all children under the age of 5.
- The **Polio** vaccine shouldn't be administered before the age of six weeks. The final dose to complete the series should be given at age four and at least six months following the previous dose.
- The **Influenza** vaccine should be given at six months of age or older, and should be administered annually to age 18.
- **Measles, Mumps and Rubella** vaccinations shouldn't be administered before a child's first birthday. The second dose should be given routinely between the ages of four and six years.
- The **Varicella** vaccine shouldn't be administered before a child's first birthday. The second dose should be given routinely between the ages of four and

six years.

- The **Hepatitis A** vaccine shouldn't be administered before age 12 months, but is highly recommended for all one year olds. Older children can receive this vaccine if they live in an area that has a high risk of infection.
- The **Meningococcal** vaccine shouldn't be given before age two.

It is common for parents and caregivers to have questions about what is best for their children when it comes to vaccines. To learn more, talk to your pediatrician or visit [www.cdc.gov/vaccines](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines).

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