

Why Immunizations are Important

"I've heard that vaccines are not needed because these diseases were disappearing even before the vaccines were developed."

This is not true. Many diseases do not occur or spread as much as they used to, thanks to better nutrition, less crowded living conditions, antibiotics, and, most importantly, vaccines. However, this does not mean that the bacteria and viruses that are responsible for these diseases have disappeared. Immunizations are still needed to protect children from these diseases.

For example, Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib) diseases were a major problem a few years ago until the vaccine was developed for infants. Over several years, we went from 20,000 cases of Hib diseases to less than a few hundred. The vaccine is the only explanation for this decrease. Unvaccinated children are still at risk for Hib meningitis and other serious illnesses.

"Chickenpox is not a fatal disease, so that vaccine is not necessary."

This is not true. Each year, about 9,000 people are hospitalized for chickenpox. About 100 people die from the disease. The chickenpox vaccine will protect most children from getting chickenpox. Since the vaccine was licensed in 1995, millions of doses have been given to children in the United States. Many studies show the vaccine is safe and effective. Research is being done to see how long protection from the vaccine lasts and whether a person will need a booster shot in the future.

"I am breastfeeding so my child doesn't need immunizations."

Immunizations are still needed. While breastfeeding *is* the best nutrition for your baby, it does not prevent infections the way vaccines do. Your child may have fewer colds, but breastfeeding does not protect against many serious illnesses such as whooping cough, polio, and diphtheria like immunizations do.

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

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 vaccines. They can only hope that people around them are immunized.