

Opinion: Vaccinations critical for kids

By Michelle Feeney

As a parent, we want our children to be safe. Certain safety measures are designed to help keep children safe, like child safety seats, seat belts, and toddler gates. However, some parents may overlook one critical component to keep children healthy and safe: vaccinations. Current vaccinations are the most effective and safest they have been in history and have saved millions of lives from vaccine-preventable diseases.

Vaccines are ensured by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and monitored by the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS), a national vaccine safety surveillance program.



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Side effects from vaccines vary, but the most common are discomfort, redness, or tenderness at the site of injection. Serious side effects following vaccination, such as severe allergic reaction, are rare. The CDC estimates 0.00001 percent of all vaccinations have a serious side effect. Considering the pain and suffering caused from acquiring these preventable diseases, for most people the benefits of vaccines outweigh side effects or getting the disease.

Families, healthcare professionals, and public health officials must work together to protect our community. Adults must also keep up on their vaccinations. Vaccinations help preserve the health of our community, especially individuals who cannot be vaccinated, including children who are too young or those who can't receive certain vaccines for medical reasons, and the small portion of people who don't respond to a particular vaccine.

Vaccines work by triggering the immune system to produce antibodies to fight antigens or disease, without being infected with the disease. In other words, vaccination protects us against a disease without getting the disease.

Each day, we are exposed to hundreds of viruses and antigens. Miraculously, the human body can tolerate a large amount of immunologic stimuli without causing illness.

Vaccinations have greatly improved our overall health. Because of the polio vaccine, the U.S. has had no new polio cases since 1979. However, polio still exists in under-vaccinated countries such as Afghanistan, Nigeria and Pakistan. Though preventable, it is a crippling and potentially deadly disease with no cure. Worldwide, cases have fallen from an estimated 350,000 in 1988 to 407 in 2013.

As a family nurse practitioner, I believe vaccinations are the safest way to protect ourselves and our community from devastating diseases. An immunization schedule works effectively with a child's immune system at specific ages and frequency. The CDC, FDA, and VAERS evaluate the immunization schedule yearly based on the most current information. Contact your primary care provider for what is currently recommended for you and your child.

For disease specific information and vaccination schedule, visit the following sites:

American Academy of Pediatrics

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

National Network for Immunization Information

Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System.

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