Five Important Reasons to Vaccinate Your Child

National Immunization Awareness Month is a reminder that children need vaccines right from the start.

You want to do what is best for your children. You know about the importance of car seats, baby gates and other ways to keep them safe. But did you know that one of the best ways to protect your children is to make sure they have *all* of their vaccinations?

Immunizations can save your child's life. Because of advances in medical science, your child can be protected against more diseases than ever before. Some diseases that once injured or killed thousands of children are no longer common in the United States – primarily due to safe and effective vaccines. Polio is one example of the great impact that vaccines had in the United States. Polio was once America's most feared disease, causing death and paralysis across the country but today, thanks to vaccination, there are no reports of polio in the United States.

Vaccination is very safe and effective. Vaccines are only given to children after a long and careful review by scientists, doctors, and healthcare professionals. Vaccines will involve some discomfort and may cause pain, redness, or tenderness at the site of injection, but this is minimal compared to the pain, discomfort, and trauma of the diseases these vaccines prevent. Serious side effects following vaccination, such as severe allergic reaction, are very rare. The disease-prevention benefits of getting vaccines are much greater than the possible side effects for almost all children.

Immunization protects others you care about. Children in the United States still get vaccine-preventable diseases. In fact, we have seen a resurgence of whooping cough (pertussis) over the past few years. For example, more than 18,000 cases of whooping cough were reported in the United States in 2015. Each year up to 20 babies die from whooping cough in the United States. Most deaths are babies who are too young to be protected by their own vaccination.

Unfortunately, some babies are too young to be completely vaccinated and some people may not be able to receive certain vaccinations due to severe allergies, weakened immune systems from conditions like leukemia, or other reasons. To help keep them safe and protected from vaccine-preventable diseases, it is important that you and your children who are able to get vaccinated are fully immunized. This not only protects your family, but also helps prevent the spread of these diseases to your friends and loved ones.

Immunizations can save your family time and money. A child with a vaccine-preventable disease can be denied attendance at schools or child care facilities. Some vaccine-preventable diseases can result in prolonged disabilities and can take a financial toll because of lost time at work and medical bills. In contrast, getting vaccinated against these diseases is a good investment and usually covered by insurance or the Vaccines for Children (VFC) program, which is a federally funded program that provides vaccines at no cost to children from low-income families.

To find out more about the VFC program, visit www.cdc.gov/vaccines/programs/vfc/ or ask your child's healthcare professional.

Immunization protects future generations. Vaccines have reduced and, in some cases, eliminated many diseases that killed or severely disabled people just a few generations ago. For example, smallpox vaccination eradicated that disease worldwide. Your children don't have to get smallpox shots anymore because the disease no longer exists. By vaccinating children against rubella (German measles), the risk that pregnant women will pass this virus on to their fetus or newborn has been dramatically decreased, and birth defects associated with that virus are rarely seen in the United States. If we continue vaccinating now, and vaccinating according to the recommended schedule, parents in the future may be able to trust that some diseases of today will no longer be around to harm their children in the future.

For more information about the importance of infant immunization, visit www.cdc.gov/vaccines.