

Immunizations: Get the facts, understand the benefits



Starting July 22, 2011, parents who “exempt” their child from required immunizations for school or child care must get a signed exemption certificate from a licensed health care provider stating the parent has been educated on the benefits and risks of immunizations.

Facts

Immunizations save lives. Vaccination is one of the greatest medical success stories in human history, saving millions of lives.

Many vaccine-preventable diseases can have dangerous consequences, including seizures, brain damage, blindness, and even death. These diseases still exist even though many parents today have never seen a case, due to the success of the nation’s current immunization program.

Immunizations are safe. The risks from immunizations are far less than the risks from “opting out.” Serious side effects from vaccines are rare. The U.S. currently has the safest, most effective vaccines in history. Years of testing are required by law before vaccines can be licensed. Even after they are approved for use, vaccines continue to be monitored for safety and how well they work.

Thimerosal is no longer in childhood vaccines. As noted by the American Academy of Pediatrics, rumors have spread that thimerosal, a mercury-based preservative once used in some vaccines, may contribute to Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs). Multiple valid scientific studies, however, have shown there is no link.

Thimerosal has not been used in routinely recommended childhood vaccines since 2001 (with the exception of some flu vaccines). Parents can request thimerosal-free flu vaccine from their licensed healthcare provider.

Since the decision to remove thimerosal from childhood vaccines, there has been no decrease in the number of new autism cases in the U.S. or other countries. If autism was due to infant exposure to thimerosal, then removal would have led to a decrease in the disease.

Kids can get multiple vaccines at the same time. Babies’ immune systems can easily handle many vaccines at one visit without being overloaded.

Benefits – Immunizations save lives

Immunization is the single most important way parents can protect their children, family, and community against serious diseases.

- **Immunizations prevent common but serious illnesses.** Some diseases, such as measles and whooping cough, still occur in the U.S. at low levels. When fewer people are immunized against these diseases, outbreaks can and do occur.

- **Immunizations prevent diseases that are common in other parts of the world.** While rare in the U.S., polio and other diseases still infect people in other parts of the world. Infected travelers can bring diseases into this country. These illnesses are only a plane ride away.
- **Immunizations protect others in your family and community.** By immunizing your child, you protect those who have weak immune systems, who are not fully immunized and who are too young or too old to get certain vaccines.
- **Immunizations are affordable.** State and federally subsidized funds pay for all recommended vaccines for all children in Washington state.





Make an informed decision about childhood immunizations

Learn the Facts

Exempting children from immunizations carries serious risks

- **The risk of life-threatening diseases** to your child, and others in your family and community — especially pregnant women, newborns, elderly, and immune-compromised individuals.
- **Potential to be excluded from school if an outbreak occurs.** If an outbreak occurs at school or child care, those who have not been immunized may be excluded from school or child care. Since the incubation time for some diseases can be 1-3 weeks, this could mean missing 2-6 weeks of school.
- **There are no effective alternatives to immunization** for protection against serious and sometimes deadly diseases. Many vaccine-preventable diseases cannot be effectively treated or cured.
- **Travel to foreign countries where diseases are common can be risky.** People who are not immunized are at risk of contracting serious and life-threatening illnesses when traveling. Crowded places — airports, airplanes, amusement parks — can promote the spread of disease.

Additional information and resources

This flyer contains information from the following sources. For additional, detailed information, please contact:

Washington State Medical Association (WSMA)

www.wsma.org/patient_resources

Washington State Department of Health

www.doh.wa.gov

Plain Talk About Childhood Immunizations

Download a copy of the booklet *Plain Talk About Childhood Immunizations* at <http://here.doh.wa.gov/materials/plain-talk-about-childhood-immunizations>. Or call the Family Health Hotline at 1 (800) 322-2258.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

www.cdc.gov/vaccine

American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)

Download a copy of Facts for Parents About Vaccine Safety at www.aap.org/advocacy/releases/autismparentfacts.htm

Every Child by Two

www.vaccinateyourbaby.org

National Network for Immunization

www.immunizationinfo.org/parents

Immunization Action Coalition

www.vaccineinformation.org

