

IMMUNIZATIONS

Immunizations are important to the health and well-being of children. Vaccines help to prevent serious diseases in young children. In the past, diseases like polio, mumps, measles, whooping cough and diphtheria were responsible for many illnesses, permanent disabilities and even death. Today we rarely hear about these diseases due to the vaccines now available

Immunizations are available through any physician or pediatrician. The cost is often covered by health insurance. For families who do not have health insurance, or whose health insurance does not cover immunizations, county health departments make the vaccinations available. The health department will administer the vaccinations at a minimal cost, or for people who are unable to pay, they will be administered free of charge.

The immunizations necessary for children to receive include:

POLIO: There are two types of polio vaccines. Most physicians recommend the live oral polio vaccine, which is called OPV. "Live" means that the polio virus used in the vaccine is still alive, but has been made very weak. This type of vaccine is given as drops in the mouth. The other vaccine is called IPV (inactivated polio vaccine). "Inactivated" means that the polio virus used in the vaccine has been killed. This type of vaccine is given as a shot. The best way to be protected against polio is to get four doses of polio vaccine. Most babies should get two doses by four months of age and a third dose at 15-18 months of age. The fourth dose is given at 4-6 years of age.

OPT: This is a three-in-one vaccine. Vaccinations against three different diseases: diphtheria, Pertussis (Whooping Cough) and Tetanus, are combined and given as one shot. This vaccination is usually given 5 times before a child reaches 7 years of age. Three of the shots are given before the child reaches 6 months of age. A child who is older than 7 years of age or an adult is usually given the Td vaccine (tetanus and diphtheria).

MMR: This is another type of three-in-one vaccine. It protects against measles, mumps and rubella. Usually, it is given two times, first at 15 months of age and again before school entry (4-6 years-of-age).

HIB: Hib vaccinations should be given at 2,4,6 and 15 months of age for optimum protection.

HEPATITIS B: Hepatitis B is an infection of the liver caused by the hepatitis B virus. It is passed from one person to another in blood or body secretions. It is highly contagious and the disease may become chronic. Three vaccinations, given on three different occasions (at least one month apart) are needed for full protection. A newborn baby may receive the first vaccinations before leaving the hospital following birth.