**Making the Immunization Decision: Addressing Common Concerns**

**A Handout for Caregivers**

With so much information—and sometimes incorrect information—available today, learning the facts before making health decisions is very important. Many caregivers have questions about immunizations, and getting answers they can trust may be hard. Talk to your child's doctor if you have questions or concerns about immunizations for your child. The diseases immunizations prevent can be dangerous, or even deadly. Statistically, the chances of your child getting diseases such as measles, pertussis, or another immunization-preventable disease might be low, and your child might never need the protection immunizations offer. HOWEVER, you don’t want them to be lacking the protection immunizations provide if they ever do need it.

For caregivers who have questions about the schedule or wonder why it’s so important to follow, here are six reasons why you should vaccinate your child on time:

1. *Ideal timing*: CDC’s recommended immunization schedule is safe and effective at protecting your child. It’s based on how your child’s immune system responds to immunizations at various ages, and how likely your child is to be exposed to a particular disease. This ensures protection from 14 potentially serious diseases at exactly the right time.
2. *Prevent complications*: Delaying immunizations could leave your child vulnerable to disease when they are most likely to have serious complications. Think of immunizations like a helmet for your child. Just like safety equipment protects her from serious injury, vaccinating on schedule protects her from potentially serious diseases.
3. *Early protection*: It’s best to vaccinate before your child is exposed to dangerous diseases. You wouldn’t wait until you’re already driving down the road to put your baby in a car seat. You buckle them in every time, long before there is any chance he could be in a crash. Immunizations work the same way—your child needs them long before they are exposed to a disease. If you wait until you think your child could be exposed to a serious illness – like when he starts daycare or during a disease outbreak – there may not be enough time for the immunization to work.
4. *Best Protection*: Your child isn’t fully protected if you cover just a few of the outlets they can reach around your home. Each immunization is carefully developed to protect against a specific illness. Some require more than one dose to build strong enough immunity to protect your child, or to boost immunity that decreases over time. Others need additional doses to ensure your child is protected in case the first dose didn’t produce enough antibodies. Your child needs the flu immunization each year because the disease changes over time. Simply put, every recommended dose of each immunization on the schedule is important.
5. *Long-term protection*: Just as you help your child learn to walk, the protection (antibodies) you passed to your child before birth will help protect your little one from diseases during the first months of life.  And just as your child needs to eventually walk on his own, his immune system eventually needs to fight diseases on its own. Immunizations help protect your child when your maternal antibodies wear off.
6. *Spreading illness*: Children who are not vaccinated on schedule are not only at risk of getting sick themselves, but they can also spread illness to others who aren’t protected, like newborns who are too young for immunizations and people with weakened immune systems. By getting your child’s immunizations on time you’re not only protecting your baby — you’re helping to protect your friends, family, and community, too.

**PreTeen and Teen Vaccination information:**

Providing educational resources to parents will help them understand the importance of vaccinating their children and answer many of their questions about vaccination.

HPV (Human Papillomavirus): HPV vaccination is recommended at ages 11-12 years to protect against cancers caused by HPV infection. There are two doses of the HPV shot are needed, 6-12 months apart. Your child can get the first dose of the HPV immunization at the same visit they get immunizations to protect against meningitis and whooping cough.

The why?

- Protects against infections that can lead to certain cancers.

Protects against abnormal cells that can lead to cancer (precancers) and the lasting effects of testing and treatment for these precancers.

Protects your child long before they are ever exposed to cancer-causing infections.

With over 135 million doses distributed in the United States, HPV immunization has a reassuring safety record that’s backed by over 15 years of monitoring and research. Getting parents to view HPV vaccination as the social norm is a key tool in raising vaccination rates. From creating awareness to educating parents on the benefits of vaccination, CDC and our partners can make an impact. Why is the HPV immunization recommended at such a young age?

* The HPV immunization is more effective if given sooner rather than later. This is partly because pre-teens produce more antibody after HPV vaccination than older teens do.  This is why younger adolescents need fewer HPV immunization doses than older teens need to get the same protection.
	+ For teens who start the series before their 15th birthday, the HPV immunization is now approved as a 2-dose series. The doses should be given 6 to 12 months apart.
	+ If the immunization is started at age 15 or later, a 3-dose series of HPV immunization is given (over a six-month period) for adequate protection.

Why does my son need HPV immunization if it protects against cervical cancer?

* The most common cancer caused by HPV is cancer of the mouth and throat. This HPV cancer is more common in males than females.
	+ HPV immunization can prevent other HPV-caused problems such as cancers of the penis and anus, and genital warts.
	+ HPV immunization does prevent cervical pre-cancer and cancer in females. A preteen boy who receives HPV immunization can protect his future spouse. When grown, a man who is infected and doesn't know it (there are usually no symptoms) can spread HPV to his partner.

If my child is not sexually active, why is the HPV immunization needed?

* If we wait to vaccinate until someone is sexually active, the immunization won't work as well.  Immunizations only work if given before someone is exposed to a virus. People may be infected with HPV without having sex outside marriage. They may be exposed to the virus during intimate touching or from intercourse during marriage. The HPV immunization seems to last a lifetime—so it can never be too early to vaccinate, only too late. In short, the immunization is recommended when it is most effective. Why wait?

Is HPV common enough to warrant vaccination of all young people?

* Studies show that 50-80% of people test positive for HPV within 2-3 years of the first time they engaged in sexual activity, making it important that preteens receive the full series before first sexual activity. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that as many as 64% of teen or preteen girls may be infected with HPV, and 75% of new cases of HPV are found in persons age 15-24 years. Even if your child waits until he is married and or only has one partner in the future, your child could still be exposed to HPV by that partner.

Will receiving HPV immunization give my child permission to engage in sexual activity?

* As pediatricians, we understand this concern—we want teens to be mature before sexual activity. Studies show that children who receive HPV immunization do not have sex any earlier than those who only received other teen immunizations. This tells us that children do not see this immunization as a license to have sex.
* HPV can be spread by intimate skin-to-skin contact and oral sex, not just sexual intercourse. Condoms only cover a limited amount of skin and HPV can be spread even if a condom is used every time a person has sex. For the best protection against HPV, parents should have their children vaccinated.