



Adverse Events Following Immunisation (AEFI)

Global Immunisation Facts:

- 3 million children die every year from diseases that are entirely preventable.
- 30 million infants have no access to basic immunisation each year.
- In almost 50 nations, 60 percent of the children are not immunised.
- A child in the developing world is ten times more likely to die of a vaccine-preventable death than a child in an industrialised nation.
- One child can be fully immunised for \$17.
- Every \$1 spent on immunisation saves society up to \$29.

Why should I immunize my child?

Immunisation programmes are one of the safest and most effective types of health interventions. The smallpox vaccine wiped out smallpox. Polio vaccine is well on the way to doing the same to the polio virus: an incredible achievement. However, the benefits of immunisation are invisible to you – you will not see your child become ill with measles; you will not see your child affected by polio; they'll not get meningitis C. In this way immunisation is very different from giving a child a medicine to make them better when they are already unwell. So some people may find it tempting to 'leave it to nature'. However, deciding not to have your child immunised means putting them at risk of catching a potentially serious illness.

Immunisation is necessary for two reasons: to protect the individual and to protect communities. Vaccines protect an entire population by preventing the spread of disease from one individual to another: the more people immunised, the less chance for disease to circulate.¹

When you look at the relative risks of immunisation, it is important to remember that an unimmunised child is at greater risk of catching measles, one of the most infectious diseases there is and one which can cause serious complications or even death. The bottom line is simple: having the vaccine is safer than not having the vaccine, whether for individual people or for whole populations.

What is meant by Adverse Events Following Immunisation (AEFI)?

AEFI are events or reactions observed following vaccination. These include mild side effects (e.g. fever, nausea, rash) to life-threatening, but rare, reactions. Most reactions occur within two days. Reactions to live vaccines, such as MMR and chickenpox may occur 1-4 weeks following immunisation. Severe allergic reactions are very rare, but can occur with any vaccine. If you are concerned that your child is having a reaction to a vaccine, call your health professional immediately.



Although there are some adverse effects from certain vaccines, the benefits of vaccination far outweigh the risks. For example, with the MMR vaccine there is a risk of 1 in a 1000 of febrile convulsions (fits). But if you catch the measles disease, the risk of convulsions is 1 in 200 people with the disease.²

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), if there were no vaccines, there would be many more cases of disease, more serious side effects and more deaths.

How do I know these vaccines are safe?

The vaccines used in the recommended routine childhood immunisation have been very carefully tested. We know they are not 100% effective in every individual, but they're the best defence we have against epidemics that used to wipe out or permanently damage large numbers of people. Years of extensive laboratory and clinical tests are undertaken during a vaccine's development. Before a vaccine is put into general use it has to be licensed. In order to be granted a licence,

the manufacturers have to demonstrate its quality, safety, and efficacy in preventing the particular disease that it is intended for. Before clinical trials can be started the relevant regulatory authorities and Ethics Review Committees have to give their approval.³

In addition, countries and institutions are developing surveillance systems to monitor the safety of immunisation, to respond to adverse events and to identify causes of events that require correction.

For people in developing countries, successful immunisation programmes save thousands of lives, and organisations including ICN, UNICEF and WHO are committed to making vaccines against measles, polio and other serious diseases available to as many children as possible.

If you have any concerns about immunisation, talk to your health professional.

For more information on immunisation and adverse events, see the following websites:

World Health Organization: www.who.int/vaccines/

NHS Immunisation for Life: www.immunisation.org.uk

Canadian Coalition for Immunization Awareness and Promotion: www.immunize.cpha.ca

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Immunization Program:
www.cdc.gov/nip

¹ Canadian Coalition for Immunization Awareness and Promotion.

² www.immunisation.org.uk.

³ NHS Immunisation for Life www.immunisation.nhs.org.