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Safety & Prevention

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How Safe are Vaccines?

If you believed everything you heard on TV talk shows or read on antivaccine Internet sites, you might never allow your child to become vaccinated. In one warning after another, vaccine opponents often exaggerate or even make up immunization risks, with no scientific evidence to support their claims. They may imply that vaccines aren't effective. At the same time, they downplay or don't discuss the serious diseases that vaccines can eliminate or reduce in frequency. No wonder some parents are left feeling anxious and, in some cases, keep their youngster unvaccinated at the risk of their child's health.

You've probably heard some of the arguments made by immunization skeptics. One vaccine or another is said to cause autism, or brain damage, or multiple sclerosis, or seizures. Sometimes the alarmists warn that the vaccines are so unreliable that they leave children just as vulnerable to diseases as they were before they were vaccinated. These claims would be upsetting if they were based on fact. But they're not, and they create plenty of fear among concerned parents.

Panels of experts have confirmed again and again that today's vaccines are safer than ever. In fact, the greatest risks come when children are *not* immunized. As a responsible parent, it's important for you to be fully informed. You can talk to your pediatrician if you have any concerns.

Gaining Perspective

Before a vaccine is ever approved and licensed, it goes through years of testing for safety and effectiveness. Neither the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) nor government agencies like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention would recommend a vaccine that had not passed the tests for safety and effectiveness. Of course, no vaccine or medicine is perfect. Some boys and girls who are immunized will experience reactions. Fortunately, when they occur, most are mild and short lived. Your child may experience redness, pain, or swelling at the site of the injection. She may develop a slight fever. After a few days, however, these minor symptoms will disappear, with no lasting effects.

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