

VACCINES FOR YOUR CHILD

By Alan S. Peterson, MD

WHAT ARE VACCINES AND WHY SHOULD MY CHILD GET THEM?

Vaccines are medicines that prevent certain diseases. These diseases can cause serious health problems or even death. Some of the diseases are hard to cure and can be easily spread to other children or adults. In our area with so many of the Amish not being fully immunized, this increases the chances of spread for these diseases in non-Amish. If your child gets a vaccine, he or she should be protected from getting those diseases that the vaccines are made for.

HOW DO I KNOW IF MY CHILD NEEDS ANY VACCINES?

Ask your family doctor or your child's school nurse. They can check your child's medical records to see which vaccines are needed.

ARE VACCINES SAFE?

Yes, current vaccines are safe and effective. Vaccines are monitored for safety using information from health centers from all over the world.

ARE THERE ANY SIDE EFFECTS?

Your child may have mild soreness where the shot is given, mild redness, and a slight fever. Serious side effects are rare. The benefits of getting vaccines are much higher than the risks for most people.

WHICH VACCINES SHOULD MY CHILD GET AND WHEN?

- ✓ **Hep B vaccine.** This protects your child from Hepatitis B, a serious liver infection. The vaccine is given at birth, 1-2 months of age, and 6-18 months of age, and to older children who have not been vaccinated or who have not received the full series.
- ✓ **Rotavirus.** This protects your child from a virus that can cause vomiting, diarrhea, and dehydration. It usually prevents the need for hospitalization due to these symptoms. The vaccine is given by mouth, usually at 2, 4, and 6 months of age. It can only be used in babies. The first shot of the series must be started no later than 15 weeks of age.
- ✓ **DTaP vaccine.** This protects your child from diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis (whooping cough). These are serious infections that can cause breathing problems, "lock jaw," difficulty swallowing, severe coughing, and even death. The vaccine is given at ages 2, 4, 6 and 15-18 months of age. A booster dose (a dose to keep your child immune to the disease for an extended period of time) is given at 4-6 years of age.

- ✓ **Hib vaccine.** This protects your child against a serious infection that can cause meningitis, pneumonia, blood infection, joint infections, and death. The vaccine is given at 2, 4, 6 (with some brands), and 12-15 months of age.
- ✓ **PCV or Prevnar vaccine.** This protects your child from an infection that can cause blood or ear infections, pneumonia and meningitis (an infection of the fluid around the brain). The vaccine is given to babies at 2, 4, 6 and 12-15 months of age.
- ✓ **IPV vaccine.** This protects your child from polio, a disease that can cause paralysis and death. The vaccine is given at 2, 4, and 6 months of age and again at 4-6 years of age.
- ✓ **Influenza vaccine.** This protects your child from the flu. There are two forms of flu vaccine; a shot and a nose spray. Children older than 6 months can get the flu shot. Some children will require two flu doses this year if they are under 9 years of age and have not received two flu shots before in their life. There needs to be four weeks between the two flu shots. Children older than two years of age who don't have asthma or any medical problems can get the flu vaccine as a nose spray, if this is available at your doctor's office.
- ✓ **MMR vaccine.** This protects your child from measles, mumps, and rubella (German measles). These diseases can cause severe illness, brain infection, sterility, and damage to an unborn child. The vaccine may be given in a shot with the chicken pox or varicella vaccine, if available, or separately at ages 12-15 months, and again at 4-6 years.
- ✓ **Varicella vaccine.** This protects your child from chicken pox. The vaccine is given at 12 months of age and again at 4-6 years of age. Two doses are recommended for older children who have not received the vaccine and that have never had chicken pox disease.
- ✓ **Hepatitis A vaccine.** This protects your child from hepatitis A, another liver serious liver infection. The vaccine is given at 15 months of age and again at 24 months of age. It should be given to older children who have not had the vaccine before, with at least 6 months between the two doses.

WHAT VACCINES CAN MY OLDER CHILDREN RECEIVE?

- ✓ **Tdap vaccine.** This protects your child from pertussis, as well as diphtheria and tetanus. The vaccine is given once at age 10 years or any time five years after the previous tetanus booster. Booster doses of the tetanus diphtheria (Td) vaccine are given every ten years or sooner if there is a wound. The Tdap vaccine is also an immunization that all adults should have (once) to prevent them from being a pertussis (whooping cough) carrier and giving it to their children or grandchildren, that are not fully immunized.
- ✓ **HPV vaccine.** This protects your child from a virus that can cause genital warts and cervical cancer. It is the only immunization that can prevent cancer. The vaccine is given to girls any time after 9 years of age and is approved up to age 26 years. This has to be given before the virus disease has invaded the body. It is not a treatment once the virus has been contracted.

- ✓ **MCV or Meningococcal vaccine.** This protects your child from a serious infection that can cause meningitis and death. Neurological consequences can be severe and life long if death does not occur. The vaccine is given at 11-12 years of age or to people starting high school or college.

WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION ABOUT VACCINES?

Once again, your family doctor is an excellent source of information. An excellent website is The American Academy of Family Physicians site at <http://familydoctor.org> and also The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Their site is <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/>. Another website is “Voices for Vaccines.” I urge all those who have fears about vaccines to “Google” the last site for information.