Vaccines: Imperative to good health

One of the best ways a parent can protect a child is by ensuring he has the right vaccines at the right time. As a physician, you can help.

Children are left susceptible to contagious diseases, such as chickenpox, measles or hepatitis if they are not immunized. Some of the diseases are debilitating, have life-long effects, and can even be deadly. Vaccinations are extremely important for the health of a child as well as the health of the community. Millions of lives have been saved thanks to vaccines.

Each year the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) publishes an updated recommended immunization list and schedule for children (birth through 6 years) and for preteens and teens (7-18 years).

HOW DO VACCINES PREVENT DISEASE?

1. A weakened form of the disease germ or a part of its structure is injected into the body.
2. The body responds by making antibodies, a type of protein in our body that helps fight these invaders.
3. If the germs ever try to attack our body, the antibodies will return to destroy them and prevent infection.

It can be difficult for parents to watch a child receive a shot—but physicians can help parents understand that it's not nearly as painful as watching a child suffer with a disease that could've been
prevented. Multiple vaccines are often combined into single injections whenever possible to reduce the number of shots a child needs. Certain vaccines, such as those for measles or hepatitis B, last a lifetime. However, periodic shots, known as boosters, are needed for certain diseases—such as tetanus.

Flu shots are another vaccination that is needed more than once. A flu shot is recommended every year for children 6 months and older. Pregnant women need a flu shot too because having the flu when pregnant can increase the risk of miscarriage, premature birth, low birth weight of a baby and death of the mother. Plus, a flu shot for mom helps protect the baby after birth too. Infants are susceptible to the flu but can’t receive a vaccine until at least six months old. When mom receives a flu shot during pregnancy, the antibodies she develops are passed through the placenta to help protect the baby.

VACCINE RISKS, SIDE EFFECTS

There are risks with all medicines—including those in vaccines. However, the benefits of vaccines far outweigh the risks. In recent years, media outlets have fueled fears that vaccines can cause conditions such as autism. Organizations such as the CDC, the National Institutes of Health and the World Health Organization all agree that there’s no evidence that vaccines cause autism.

Potential reactions from a vaccine shot can include soreness, redness, swelling at the site of the injection and fever. These reactions are temporary and will subside. For the health and safety of children, help parents understand that vaccinations are important to their family’s good health.