IMMUNIZATIONS

HOW TO ANSWER FAQs

for healthcare providers

Talking About Vaccines

Empathetic

Effective, empathetic communication is critical in responding to parents who are considering not vaccinating their children.

Parents should be helped to feel comfortable voicing any concerns or questions they have about vaccination.

Evaluate

Evaluate whether the child has a valid contraindication to a vaccine by asking about medical history, allergies, and previous experiences.

Assess

Assess the parent's reason for wanting to delay or forgo the vaccination in a non-confrontational manner.

- Have they had a bad experience?
- Have they obtained troubling information?

Take advantage of early opportunities such as the prenatal, newborn, 1-week, and 1-month visits to begin a dialogue about vaccines. These also are good opportunities to provide take-home materials or direct parents to immunization websites that you trust. This gives parents time to read and digest reputable vaccine information before the first and all future immunizations.

1 Won't giving my baby so many vaccines overwhelm his/her immune system?

Babies begin being exposed to immunological challenges immediately at the time of birth.

- When babies are born and take their first breath, they are immediately colonized with trillions of bacteria, which means that they carry the bacteria in their bodies but aren't infected by them.
- Healthy babies constantly make antibodies against these bacteria and viruses.

Vaccines use only a tiny proportion of a baby's immune system's ability to respond.

- Though children receive more vaccines than in the past, today's vaccines contain fewer antigens than previous vaccines.
- Smallpox vaccine alone contained 200 proteins; the 11 currently recommended routine vaccines contain fewer than 130 immunologic components.

2 Why don't you recommend spacing out vaccines using an alternative schedule?

Delaying vaccines increases the time children will be susceptible to serious diseases.

- Measles: There were 667 cases of measles in the U.S. in 2014. The majority of people who got measles were unvaccinated.
- Pertussis: This disease is especially dangerous in infants before they're fully vaccinated. In 2014, there were 32,971 pertussis cases reported in the U.S.

Requiring many extra appointments for vaccinations increases the stress for the child and may lead to a fear of medical procedures.

There is no evidence that spreading out the schedule decreases the risk of adverse reactions.

3 Hasn't the mercury in vaccines been shown to cause autism?

The form of mercury found in thimerosal is ethylmercury (not methylmercury, which is the form that has been shown to damage the nervous system).

Although no evidence of harm has been proven, thimerosal was taken out of vaccines in the U.S., as a precaution and because there are other preservative options.

Since 2001, with the exception of some influenza vaccines, thimerosal has not been used as a preservative in routinely recommended childhood vaccines in the U.S.

Multiple studies comparing vaccinated and unvaccinated children have shown that thimerosal in vaccines does not cause autism.

Studies of three countries compared the incidence of autism before and after thimerosal was removed from vaccines and found no decrease in autism with the use of thimerosal-free vaccines.

4 Don't I have the right not to vaccinate my child?

Vaccination laws have been found to be constitutional in U.S. courts. The seminal case was Jacobson v. Massachusetts in 1905. The Court upheld the authority of states to enforce compulsory vaccination laws.

All states offer medical exemptions.

Parents need to be aware that if they don't vaccinate their children, they are putting them, and their contacts, at risk of serious disease.

Unvaccinated children often have to stay home from school or daycare during outbreaks.

SOURCE:
Immunization Action Coalition
www.immunize.org/catg.d/S8030.pdf

Released October 2017

UNITED SOUTH AND EASTERN TRIBES, INC.
Established 1969