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CHILDHOOD IMMUNIZATION

Nowadays, parents often worry more about how their children will react to their immunization shots than about the risk of their children catching the diseases against which they are being immunized. After all, parents today no longer hear about friend's or relatives children becoming paralyzed by polio or dying of diphtheria or tetanus (lockjaw). Even the most common childhood meningitis – which caused many deaths and much permanent disability a few years ago – has almost disappeared because of vaccination.

Childhood immunization has saved millions of lives by eliminating many serious childhood diseases. But by virtue of its very effectiveness, immunization has come under scrutiny and has sometimes been deemed unnecessary and even harmful!

The media's focus on these aspects of vaccination combined with the reality that we no longer hear about many of these diseases in our own communities leads some parents to develop a false sense of security. So, every parent should be aware that diseases like polio, diphtheria, rubella, meningitis and Hepatitis B can and will reappear if we become complacent or forgetful about having our children fully protected through immunization.

THE FACTS:

Immunization of children is one of the most important aspects of maintaining their health. Before many of today's vaccines were available, it was not uncommon for children to die or become disabled as a result of infections that are now preventable. People who travel are at risk of being exposed to infections that have become rare in Canada, but still thrive in other places. In recent years, Russia, the Ukraine, the Netherlands, England, Japan and Sweden have experienced new outbreaks of diseases that everyone thought had disappeared – diphtheria, German Measles (rubella) and polio. These diseases reappeared either because governments have relaxed their immunization programs or because certain members of the population had refused immunization for their children for their own reasons.

VACCINES

Vaccines against pertussis, diphtheria, tetanus, polio, measles, mumps, rubella, Hepatitis B are part of the routine immunization starting at 2 months of age with booster doses during infancy and at school entry. Hepatitis B is given to Grade 7 students in Ontario.

CHICKEN POX (VARIVAX)

Most people believe that chicken pox is harmless, even a normal part of growing up. Of the 350,000 new cases of chicken pox that occur every year in Canada, approximately 1900 will have complication that require hospitalization. Serious complications include flesh-eating disease, osteomyelitis, pneumonia and encephalitis. Varivax-III, the chicken pox vaccine is safe, effective, and associated with minimal side effects. Furthermore, it protects your child against chicken pox for life!!

PREVNAR (PNEUMOCOCCAL VACCINE)

Streptococcus pneumoniae is a bacteria that can cause serious infection in children ranging from meningitis, pneumonia, blood infections and ear infections. The PNEUMOCOCCAL vaccine is a new vaccine in Canada since 2001. It is effective against most strains of strep pneumonia with hardly any significant associated side effects.

MENJUGATE (MENINGOCOCCAL C)

Meningococcus is a bacteria that causes serious infections in children with peak incidence in the 1st and 2nd year and in adolescents. It often causes outbreaks of meningitis in schools and other communal areas. The new meningitis vaccine is safe with no serious side effects. The protection from this vaccine is expected to last many years if not for life!