

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON VACCINES IN ZIMBABWE



Why should my child be vaccinated?

Vaccines save lives.

It is a right of every child in Zimbabwe to be vaccinated against all diseases that can be prevented by vaccination.

Vaccines will help protect your child against diseases that can cause serious harm or death, especially in people with developing immune systems like infants.

It's important to vaccinate your child. If not, highly contagious diseases such as measles, diphtheria and polio, which were once wiped out in many countries, will come back.

Are vaccines safe?

Yes. Vaccines are very safe.

All vaccines used in Zimbabwe go through rigorous safety testing, including clinical trials, before they are approved for use by the public.

The Medicines Control Authority of Zimbabwe only registers vaccines that meet rigorous quality and safety standards for use in Zimbabwe.



Introduction

The Ministry of Health and Child Care provides lifesaving vaccines to children and adults through its network of health centres, in schools and in different communities. The Ministry aims to reach every child in the country with vaccines to prevent illness, disability and death due to vaccine preventable diseases. Below are answers to the commonly asked questions about vaccines to help those who want to make the wise choice to have their children vaccinated.

What are vaccines?

Vaccines are medical products that are usually given to children to protect against serious and sometimes deadly diseases. Some vaccines are also given to adults.

How do vaccines work?

Vaccines reduce risks of getting a disease by working with your body's natural defences to build protection against specific diseases.

The body's protection mechanism is designed to remember. Once exposed to one or more doses of a vaccine, we typically remain protected against a disease for years, decades or even a lifetime. This is what makes vaccines so effective. Rather than treating a disease after it occurs, vaccines prevent us in the first instance from getting sick.

Can my baby handle all of these vaccines?

Yes. Many parents and caregivers of children worry that multiple vaccines will overload their child's immune system. This is not true. Actually children are exposed to hundreds of germs that challenge their system every day. In fact, a common cold or sore throat will put a greater burden on your child's immune system than vaccines.

But these diseases are not present in my area. Do I still need to vaccinate my child?

Yes. Although the diseases may be eliminated in your area or in Zimbabwe, our increasing cross border travel links with the rest of the world means that these diseases could spread from areas where they are still present and affect your child if not vaccinated.

What diseases do vaccines prevent?

Vaccines protect your child against serious illnesses like polio, which can cause paralysis; measles, which can cause brain swelling and blindness; and tetanus, which can cause painful muscle contractions and difficulty eating and breathing, especially in new born babies. A full list of the vaccines and the diseases they prevent has been incorporated into the child health card for your reference

Can I delay the vaccine schedule?

Any time you delay a vaccine, you're increasing your child's vulnerability to diseases. One of the best ways to protect your child is to follow the recommended vaccine schedule in Zimbabwe.

What is 'herd immunity' and why is it important?

If most of the people in your community are immunized against a certain disease, you can reach something called herd immunity. When this happens, that disease cannot spread easily from person to person because most people in the community are protected. This provides a layer of protection against serious diseases in your community or in the country at large even for those who cannot be vaccinated, such as infants.

Herd immunity also prevents disease outbreaks by making it difficult for the disease to spread since most children will be protected. The disease will become more and more rare, sometimes even disappearing entirely from your area and in the country.

Can a vaccine cause my baby to get sick?

Vaccines are very safe and serious side effects are rare. Almost all sickness or discomfort after vaccination is minor and temporary, such as pain at the injection site or mild fever. These can often be controlled by taking over-the-counter pain medicines as advised by your health care worker, or applying a cold cloth to the injection site. If as a parent or caregiver of a child you are concerned about the condition of your child after vaccination you should immediately contact your health care provider for advice.

Where can I get more information about immunisation?

You can get more information on immunisation by visiting your nearest health centre and talking to our friendly staff. You can also talk to our trained Community Health Workers in your village, farm, town or city.



This information is brought to you by the Ministry of Health and Child Care



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