

Talking Points for Media Spokespersons

Know Your Talking Points Before You Start

- Try to limit yourself to **three** points—and know which three points you want to make in a particular media exposure
- Remember that *nothing* is off the record.
- Keep sentences short and messages simple; return to message as much as possible in answering questions

Key Points

- Vaccines are safe and effective.
- Immunizations save lives and prevent long term disabilities. Immunizations protect the person immunized, the person's family and the community.
- Immunizations are the most cost-effective measure to protect the public's health.

Contact Information

- <<http://www.cdc.gov/immunization>>
- Your doctor
- <<http://www.immunizeca.org>>

Common Questions

Why are we having outbreaks of disease, when most children have been immunized?

Why are children who are up-to-date on their immunizations getting pertussis?

While routine childhood immunization against pertussis is highly effective, immunity from childhood vaccination wears off by adolescence. **Older children, parents, grandparents and other care givers can easily contract pertussis and spread it to newborn infants too young to have had their recommended vaccines.**

Are vaccines safe?

Yes. Vaccines are safe. Millions of children and adults are vaccinated every year. However, any medicine can cause reactions in some people. The most common side effects are swelling or tenderness at the injection site and fever. Serious reactions are very rare, happening in 1-2 people out of a million shots given. Many steps are taken to make sure that a vaccine is safe. After years of research, thousands of people volunteer to test it. Then, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) decides if it's safe. If it is, they will license it. After that, the Vaccine Adverse Events Reporting System (VAERS) tracks any side effects that happen hours, days, weeks, or even months later. Anyone can report a possible side effect. Scientists study VAERS reports carefully to help make sure that vaccines are safe.

Why do children today get so many immunizations?

Children today seem to be getting too many shots at once.

We give infants and toddlers immunizations to save lives! Today's vaccines protect us against more than 15 dangerous diseases. Who benefits most? Babies! Their tiny bodies may be too

weak to fight off a serious disease. Vaccine-preventable diseases (like measles, chickenpox, mumps, whooping cough, and meningitis) can cause seizures, brain damage, blindness, and even death.

**Most of these diseases are not around anymore, so why worry about them?
Are diseases like measles and diphtheria, and even chickenpox still a problem?**

Yes! These diseases are still here, but are not as common, so most young parents haven't seen them. This is the success of immunization. But kids without their shots can still get very sick from diseases like influenza, whooping cough, and chickenpox. Not too many kids get chickenpox these days. But before there was a vaccine, 11,000 Americans went to the hospital for chickenpox every year. Dangerous diseases like meningitis, measles, and mumps can spread quickly to other people. Some diseases are just a plane ride away. International travelers without all their shots can bring a disease back home and infect other people.

Vaccine Safety

**I've read that "natural immunity" is more protective and better for the child.
What about holistic medicine?**

Some people believe getting a disease is a "natural" way to start the body's defenses. If you get chickenpox once, you will not get it again, so you are "immune." **But vaccines work the same way.** They give you immune protection—but without the disease and its side effects. Natural immunity from the real disease can be dangerous. That's because it means getting sick and maybe getting serious complications.

Holistic medicines do not prevent the diseases that vaccines are made for. Before vaccines, millions of children became ill with whooping cough, measles, mumps and other diseases. Most vaccines prevent these illnesses over 99% of the time.

Is it safe for a child's immune system to have multiple shots?

Yes. Children touch or breathe hundreds of viruses or bacteria (called antigens). This happens every day when eating and playing. Antigens make the immune system do its work. Vaccines use antigens very safely even in "live" vaccines, like MMR. That's because vaccine antigens are weakened or killed, so they cannot hurt the immune system—even for babies. If a child has a weakened immune system (like from cancer or AIDS), ask the doctor about giving live vaccines. Vaccines are less dangerous than the germs children face every day.

Do vaccines cause autism?

No. Autism is increasing around the world. Studies show that it happens to the same number of vaccinated and *unvaccinated* children. No one knows yet all of the causes of autism. But we do know that children get autism at about the same age they get their regular shots. This can make shots seem related. Twenty-three studies have tested hundreds of thousands of children and found no link between autism and vaccines. The American Medical Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, Institute on Medicine, and World Health Organization all agree that there is no connection between vaccines and autism.

What about thimerosal (or mercury) in vaccines? Thimerosal was removed.