



Why Parents Should Vaccinate Their Children

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Parents have to make many decisions about their children's health. This includes deciding about vaccinating their children. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the American Academy of Pediatrics say that children should be immunized as soon as possible against 16 vaccine-preventable diseases. However, some parents worry about whether vaccines could have serious side effects. Sometimes parents choose to delay vaccines or to not give their children any vaccines.

Sixty years ago, most parents understood about the dangers of infectious diseases. Most people knew someone whose child had been paralyzed by polio, hospitalized with measles, deafened by German measles (rubella), brain damaged from meningitis, or killed by whooping cough. As more vaccines have been licensed, many vaccine-preventable diseases have almost disappeared in the United States. Modern-day parents have not personally seen the serious and deadly consequences of these diseases, and may not understand how important vaccines are.

Fortunately, most parents still understand that vaccines are needed to protect their children. On the other hand, the percentage of Arizona children whose parents have asked that their children be exempted from school and childcare-related vaccine requirements has tripled since 2000. For example, for the 2014-2015 school year, 3.6% of kindergarten children in Arizona received exemptions to some or all school-required vaccines. The more unimmunized people there are in Arizona, the more likely it is that vaccine-preventable diseases could start spreading in our state. The seven cases of measles in Arizona in 2015 due to travel to Disneyland show how easily vaccine-preventable diseases can spread to unimmunized people.

We are lucky to live in a time when vaccines can protect children against 16 serious diseases. Vaccinating children serves two important purposes: Vaccines protect the individual child, and they prevent that child from spreading diseases to other people. Parents need to vaccinate their children fully, on schedule, and as soon as possible in order to protect their children and to protect the rest of us from vaccine-preventable diseases.

To find more information about vaccines, go to www.cdc.gov/vaccines or www.immunize.org or <http://azdhs.gov/phs/immunization> or call the Arizona Immunization Program Office at (602) 364-3630.

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