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Is your infant fully immunized?

ITHACA/STANTON/ST.JOHNS~ Parents want what is best for their children. But quite often parents with the very best of intentions overlook one critical tool that could ensure their child lives a long and healthy life – immunizations.

Immunizations are one of the most important ways a parent can protect their child's health and one of the most successful and cost-effective public health tools for preventing serious disease.

Thanks to advances in medical science, children are protected against more diseases than ever before. Some diseases that once injured or killed thousands of children have been completely eliminated, while others are close to extinction— primarily due to safe and effective vaccines. For example, the smallpox vaccine eradicated that disease worldwide. As a result, children don't have to get smallpox shots anymore because the disease no longer exists. By vaccinating children against rubella (German measles), the risk that pregnant women will pass the virus on to their fetus or newborn has dramatically decreased, and birth defects associated with that virus are no longer seen in the United States. Another example of the great impact that vaccines have had is the elimination of polio in the United States. Polio was once America's most-feared disease, causing death and paralysis across the country. But today, thanks to vaccinations, there are no reports of polio in the U.S.

But with that said, it's important to keep in mind that children in the U.S. still get vaccine-preventable diseases. In fact, we have seen resurgences of measles and whooping cough (pertussis) over the past few years. In 2010 the U.S. had over 21,000 cases of whooping cough reported and 26 deaths, most in children younger than 6 months. Unfortunately, some babies are too young to be completely vaccinated and some people may not be able to receive certain vaccinations due to severe allergies, weakened immune systems from conditions like leukemia, or other reasons. To help keep these vulnerable groups safe, it is important for those who are able to get vaccinated to do so.

Immunizations can also save your family time and money. A child with a vaccine-preventable disease can be denied attendance at schools or daycare. Some vaccine-preventable diseases can result in prolonged disabilities and can take a financial toll because of lost time at work, medical bills or long-term disability care. In contrast, getting vaccinated against these diseases is a good investment and usually covered by insurance. The Vaccines for Children (VFC) program is a federally funded program that provides vaccines at no cost to children from low-income families. To find out more about the VFC program, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/programs/vfc/> or ask your child's health care professional.

Immunizations protect future generations. If we continue vaccinating now, and vaccinating completely, parents in the future may be able to trust that some diseases of today will no longer be around to harm their children.

For more information about the importance of infant immunization, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines>.

Parents and health care providers must work together to ensure that all children are fully immunized. Parents should consult with their health care provider if they are unsure whether or not their child's immunizations are up-to-date.

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