

SAMHS INFO BULLETIN

Compiled by Corporate Communication



GLOBAL/AFRICAN VACCINATION WEEK: 24-30 APRIL

WHAT IS IMMUNISATION

Immunisation protects children (and adults) against harmful infections before they come into contact with them in the community.

Immunisation uses the body's natural defence mechanism- the immune response – to build resistance to specific infections. Nine diseases can be prevented by routine child immunisation – diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, poliomyelitis (polio), measles, mumps, rubella, Haemophilus influenza type b (Hip) and hepatitis B. All of those diseases can cause serious complications and sometimes death.

World Immunisation Week, which takes places from 24 to 30 April, is an opportunity to underscore the importance of immunisation in saving lives and to encourage families to vaccinate their children against deadly diseases.

Immunisation and vaccination

Technically 'vaccination' is the term used for giving a vaccine – that is, actually getting the injection or swallowing the drops. 'Immunisation' is the term used for the process of both getting the vaccine and becoming immune to the disease as a result of the vaccine. Most people use the term 'vaccination' and immunisation interchangeably but their meanings are not exactly the same because immunity follows vaccination in most, but not all cases.

How does immunisation work?

All forms of immunisation work in the same way. When someone is injected with, or swallows, a vaccine, their body produces an immune response in the same way it would follow exposure to a disease but without the person getting the disease. If the person comes in contact with the disease in the future, the body is able to make an immune response fast enough to prevent the person getting sick.

Why do children get so many immunisations?

A number of immunisations are required in the first few years of a child's life to protect the child against the most serious infections of childhood. The immune system in young children does not work as well as the immune system in older people, so more doses of vaccine is required. In the first months of life, a baby is protected from most infections by antibodies from her or his mother which are transferred to the baby during breast feeding. When these antibodies wear off, the baby is at risk of serious infections and so the first immunisations are given before these antibodies have gone.

Approved by: D Med

Source: World Immunisation Week.

Department of Health