

SAMHS INFO BULLETIN



Compiled by Corporate Communication

IMMUNISATION CAMPAIGN

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 childhood immunisation - diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, poliomyelitis (polio), measles, mumps, rubella, Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib) and hepatitis B. All of these diseases can cause serious complications and sometimes death.

It is given as an injection or, in the case of polio vaccine, taken as drops by mouth. Immunisation helps children stay healthy by preventing serious infections.

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 terms ‘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 children and adults, because it is still immature. Therefore more doses of the vaccine are needed. 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 pregnancy. 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.

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