



# FACTS ABOUT IMMUNISATION

## EPI (SA) FACT SHEET



### 1. IMMUNISATION SAVES LIVES

Immunisation is one of the greatest medical achievements in human history, and has saved millions of lives in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Many serious childhood diseases are preventable by using vaccines routinely recommended for children. Since the introduction of these vaccines, rates of diseases such as polio, measles, hepatitis B, rubella, diphtheria, pertussis (whooping cough), and meningitis caused by haemophilus influenzae type B (Hib) have declined by 90%.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), immunisation currently saves an estimated three (3) million lives per year worldwide. Pertussis vaccine saves over 600 000 lives. Diphtheria has almost disappeared in some major regions of the world. The Hib related infections in children are said to have almost disappeared in the United States within 10 years of immunisation. Hepatitis B immunisation has caused a significant drop in the incidence of hepatocellular carcinoma.

Before immunisation, hundreds of thousands of children were infected and thousands died each year from these diseases.

### 2. IMMUNISATION PREVENT THE SPREAD OF DISEASE

Vaccination not only protects the individual but curb the spread of disease within the community. There only needs to be a certain percentage of individuals within a community who are immunised (herd immunity), then the spread of that disease will be prevented. Individuals who are not immunised, increase the risk that they and others in their community will get the diseases vaccines can prevent.

If immunisation coverage drops for conditions like measles, outbreaks may occur. It is important to maintain a high level of immunisation coverage even when the condition is becoming rare. Failure to maintain measles immunisation coverage can lead to re-emergence and outbreaks, as it happened in United States in 1989-1991. The measles epidemic was responsible for 55,000 cases and more than 120 deaths.

### 3. IMMUNISATION IS SAFE

Immunisation is safe and getting safer and more effective all the time as a result of medical research and ongoing review by medical scientists. Immunisation is given to keep people healthy and to prevent diseases.

The number of vaccines recommended for the Expanded Programme on Immunisation has increased; as a result children are now protected from more infectious diseases than before including Hepatitis B and Haemophilus influenza type B.

All vaccines used in the Expanded Programme on Immunisation in South Africa (EPI-SA), are manufactured according to strict safety requirements and are evaluated by the Medicines Control Council (MCC) to ensure efficacy, quality and safety before registration and approval for marketing. In addition, these vaccines meet WHO standards of quality, safety and efficacy.

#### **4. IMMUNISATION SAVES MONEY**

Immunisation currently remains one of the most cost effective health interventions.

According to WHO every dollar spent on vaccine saves seven dollars in medical costs and 25 dollars in overall costs related to vaccine preventable diseases. Current estimates of direct medical costs and indirect (work loss) costs of hepatitis B related liver disease exceed \$500 million annually.

#### **5. IMMUNISATION OFFERS EFFECTIVE PROTECTION**

Immunisation provides the most important and effective means through which parents can protect their children against serious diseases. Children who have not been immunised are at high risk of becoming infected with serious diseases. A recent study showed that children who had not received the measles vaccine were 35 times more likely to get the disease.

Without immunisation, the diseases we are now protected from will return to cause diseases and kill many children. There are no effective alternatives to immunisation for protection against some serious and sometimes deadly infectious diseases.

#### **DID YOU KNOW...**

- ❖ Smallpox was the first infectious disease to be globally eradicated through immunisation in 1979.
- ❖ WHO set a goal to eradicate Polio worldwide by 2005.
- ❖ In South Africa, the last polio case due to the wild poliovirus was reported in 1989.
- ❖ The final countdown to a polio free South Africa was launched on 11 April 2002.
- ❖ All cases with sudden weakness or lameness of either arm(s) and/or leg(s) in children under the age of 15 years (not caused by injury) should be reported immediately to the nearest health care centre.
- ❖ Vaccines are free of charge at local clinics and community health centres in South Africa.
- ❖ All children have a right to basic health care. NB. Immunisation is one of the health care components.

- ❖ The government of South Africa currently devotes more than R80 million on vaccines.
- ❖ Only when a disease has been completely eradicated worldwide can immunisation be discontinued safely.
- ❖ **The first week of August has been declared National Immunisation Awareness Week in South Africa.**

## National Routine Immunisation Schedule

Age of Child	Which Vaccine?	How and where is it given?
<b>At birth</b>	BCG (vaccine against tuberculosis) Polio vaccine	Vaccination in upper Right arm Drops by mouth
<b>6 weeks old</b>	Polio vaccine DTP* vaccine Hib† vaccine Hepatitis B vaccine	Drops by mouth Injection in Left thigh Injection in Left thigh Injection in Right thigh
<b>10 weeks old</b>	Polio vaccine DTP* vaccine Hib† vaccine Hepatitis B vaccine	Drops by mouth Injection in Left thigh Injection in Left thigh Injection in Right thigh
<b>14 weeks old</b>	Polio vaccine DTP* vaccine Hib† vaccine Hepatitis B vaccine	Drops by mouth Injection in Left thigh Injection in Left thigh Injection in Right thigh
<b>9 months old</b>	Measles vaccine	Injection in Right thigh
<b>18 months old</b>	Polio vaccine DTP* vaccine Measles vaccine	Drops by mouth Injection in Left arm Injection in Right arm
<b>5 years old</b>	Polio vaccine DT** vaccine	Drops by mouth Injection in Left arm
DTP* = vaccine against diphtheria, whooping cough and tetanus (lock-jaw) DT** = vaccine against diphtheria and tetanus only Hib† = vaccine against <i>Haemophilus influenzae</i> type b		

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