



WELLNESS WORKS....

at Brain Injury Community Re-entry (Niagara) Inc.

A Publication from Brain Injury Community Re-entry Niagara's Wellness Works Committee

September 2009

IMMUNIZATIONS

The World Health Organization estimates that every year, more than two million deaths are prevented worldwide due to immunization. Immunization is an important, cost-effective and successful public health intervention. It effectively prevents disease, improves the health of Canadians and reduces pressures on our health care system.

Over the last century, vaccines have saved more lives than any other health intervention.

Vaccines have led to the eradication of smallpox, the near eradication of polio, and the control of other diseases, including polio and whooping cough, which once maimed or killed in large numbers. The key to success is maintained population coverage for vaccines. When immunization coverage rates drop significantly, disease returns.

Vaccine coverage rates in Canada are high but concerns expressed by some people about the safety of vaccines would lead to a drop in coverage rates. This would result in increases in preventable diseases such as poliomyelitis, measles, mumps, rubella, tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis, meningitis and hepatitis B. While it is true that no vaccine is 100% safe or effective, serious adverse reactions are rare. The dangers of vaccine-preventable diseases are many times greater than the risks of a serious adverse reaction to the vaccine.

The rate of reported serious adverse events following immunization is very low – between one and two for every one hundred thousand doses administered. There have been multiple scientific investigations into these alleged links over the last two decades, and the results have been reviewed by independent experts as well as public health and regulatory authorities.

There have also been reports of links between thimerosal, a preservative used in some vaccines, and neuro-developmental disorders including autism. Several studies, using a variety of epidemiologic methods have produced evidence that there is no association between thimerosal and autism. This finding was endorsed by Canada's National Advisory Committee on Immunization after scientific review in 2007. Scientific research in this area is ongoing and new studies continue to emerge which reject the link.

There is no legitimate safety reason to avoid the use of thimerosal-containing products for children or older individuals, including pregnant women. Nonetheless, because ongoing public concern about the safety of thimerosal could reduce immunization coverage rates, thimerosal is not used in most vaccines routinely used in Canada.

Allegations that vaccines can cause autism, multiple sclerosis, or macrophagic myofasciitis are not new and they have been taken seriously by the scientific and public health communities. There is consensus that the evidence does not support any link between vaccines and these diseases.



WELLNESS WORKS...

at Brain Injury Community Re-entry (Niagara) Inc.

There is endless information available on the internet which can make research confusing since, often, information from one website contradicts information from another. When evaluating information about vaccines, there are a few key questions you can ask yourself to make sure you are reading valuable information:

- **What is the source of the information?**
The website should clearly identify the person or organization that produced it, list all the sources of funding, and provide a way to contact the provider.
- **Has the medical information been reviewed by scientific experts?**
If yes, the experts should be identified, including their credentials.
- **Is there a date showing when the information was posted or last revised?**
If yes, is it current?
- **Is there scientific evidence to back up the claims?**
If yes, the site should provide the sources (e.g., articles from respected medical journals) for the scientific evidence (e.g., studies, reports, statistics). Keep in mind that not all "studies" or "reports" are necessarily reliable.
- **Is the site certified by the Health On the Net Foundation?**
Health On the Net (HON) Foundation is a Swiss not-for-profit organization that helps Internet users find useful and reliable online medical information. HON has developed guidelines for health sites, and those that meet the criteria can use the HON seal.
- **Does the website present a balanced point of view?**
A number of published studies have reviewed websites with anti-vaccine messages. These sites have many things in common, including: making false claims about vaccines, having links to other anti-vaccine sites, promoting alternative therapies like homeopathy and naturopathy as *better* than vaccines, and citing parents as "experts" on the alleged dangers of vaccines.

Immunization for Travellers

There is no single schedule for the administration of immunizations to travellers. Each schedule must be personalized. The immunization recommendations for travellers will vary according to the traveller's age, immunization history, existing medical conditions, countries to be visited, the duration and nature of travel (whether the traveller is staying in urban hotels or visiting remote rural areas), the legal requirements for entry into countries being visited and the amount of time before departure.

Immunizations related to travel can be divided into three general categories: those that are considered routine (part of the primary series of immunizations or **routine** booster dose), those **required** by international law and those **recommended** for maintenance of health while travelling.

A health care provider or travel medicine clinic ideally should be consulted two to three months in advance of travel. Even if a traveller is leaving at short notice, a pre-travel consultation will be beneficial. A listing of travel clinics across Canada can be found in the Travel Medicine Program section of the PHAC website,
www.travelhealth.gc.ca.

General Schedule for Childhood Immunizations

Vaccine \ Age At Vaccination														
2 months														
4 months														
6 months														
1 year of age														
15 months														
18 months														
4-6 years														
12 years old														
14-16 years														
Every Autumn														

For more information on immunizations visit Public Health at www.regional.niagara.on.ca/government/health/.