**Childhood Vaccinations**

**What You Should Know**

It is no surprise that is is much better to prevent a disease than to treat it. Disease prevention, made possible in part by proper childhood vaccinations, is the key to public health. Infectious diseases that once were common in this country have been brought under control or eliminated completely. The list is long, including polio, measles, diphtheria, pertussis (whooping cough), rubella (German measles), mumps, tetanus, and influenza. Perhaps one of the most devastating diseases in history was smallpox, which is almost unheard of now, thanks to a vaccine. Literally millions of lives have been saved by immunizations against disease.

Not only does immunizing your children prevent disease, but it saves money in doctor’s visits, hospitaliztions, and premature deaths. If you are a working parent, you can understand the benefit of not missing time from work with a sick child, as well.

This is the way immunization works. When children are born, they have an immune system composed of cells, glands, organs, and fluids. Germs enter the body as invaders, or antigens, which are counteracted by the body’s antibodies. Millions of antibodies are produced to defend against thousands of attacks every day-a process so natural that it is not even evident. Once the antibodies have destroyed the invading antigens, they disappear. However, the cells involved in antibody production “remember” the invaders and are able to effectively defend against the same antigens if an attack occurs later. That process is called immunity. Vaccines contain a weak form of antigens, which are not strong enough to cause disease, but are strong enough to make the immune system produce antibodies against them. Through vaccination, a child is able to build immunity without actually suffering the diseases that vaccines prevent.

Do not be fooled by the lessened occurrence of infectious diseases in the United States. The viruses and bacteria that cause devastating diseases still exist and can be passed on to those who are not properly immunized. Vaccinations are now mandatory in all 50 states, and for good reason.

You should be aware that all most vaccines have a low risk of side effects. Even so, the vast majority of children experience very few, if any, side effects. The benefit of vaccines far outweighs the risk. That said, you will want to be aware of risks and side effects so you are prepared to deal with them.

**Required Vaccinations**

Diptheria, Tetanus, Pertussis

Polio

Measles, Mumps, Rubella

Hepatitis B

Meningococcal

Varicella (Chicken Pox)