



Unlocking immunity: Why vaccinations are important

Do you ever wonder if all those childhood vaccinations and booster shots are necessary? Here's why vaccination is so important and why each of us should play our part.

South Africa has had several outbreaks of mumps, measles, whooping cough and even diphtheria recently, even though all four of these diseases are preventable. Vaccines play a crucial role in preventing their spread and limiting their severity.

How do vaccines work?

Your immune system creates antibodies after encountering disease-causing germs (pathogens). Vaccines, however, prompt your body to generate antibodies before any exposure to the disease. This proactive approach equips your body to fend off these germs should you encounter them later on. This is especially important for serious illnesses like measles, which can result in severe consequences such as deafness, brain damage, or even death.

Despite the protective shield vaccines offer against dreadful diseases, why aren't more people getting vaccinated? The reasons are varied, ranging from misinformation to doubts about vaccine safety and efficacy, as well as a lack of education on how vaccines effectively prevent diseases. It's high time to debunk some of the prevalent myths surrounding vaccination.

1. Myth: Vaccines don't work



Thousands of scientific studies show that, when done correctly, vaccinations can and do save lives. Every year, 4-million deaths around the world are prevented by childhood vaccines.

2. Myth: Natural immunity is best

Your body can become immune to some diseases after it has conquered an infection, BUT this comes at great risk of severe illness or even death. Vaccination is a safer and more reliable option to gain immunity.



3. Myth: Vaccines make you sick



You may feel a bit unwell after a vaccination. For example, you may feel tired, or experience fever, aches and pains. This isn't a sign that you've developed the illness; it's a sign that your immune system is working hard to recognise and fight the pathogens. Within a few days, you usually feel better, showing that your immune system is doing its job.

4. Myth: Vaccines cause autism

This myth has been debunked by numerous scientific studies – there is no credible evidence linking vaccines and autism.



5. Myth: You only need one shot



Most vaccines need several doses at specific intervals to build protection; booster shots may be needed later too.

Thanks to efficient vaccine programmes we've wiped out some of the world's deadliest diseases. We haven't seen polio in South Africa since 1989 and smallpox has been eradicated worldwide since 1980.

References

World Health Organization (WHO): What is vaccination?

National Health Service (NHS): Why vaccination is important

The Employee Health and Wellness Programme can provide you with more information if you have questions about vaccination.

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