



# “Immunization Highlights”

by  
Sharon Galvis, NNP.

Originally published in the Good Beginnings newsletter, “Beginnings Buzz-z-z-z-z”  
Vol. VI – Fall/Winter 2003

Vaccines are an important part of your child's health care maintenance. These "baby shots" protect your child and others from infectious diseases that have the potential to cause illness and death. Recommendations for what vaccines your child will receive and the optimal timing for each of the vaccines have been developed by health professional organizations that include the National Center for Disease Control (CDC), the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the American Academy of Family Physicians.

Vaccines contain weakened or killed bacteria or viruses that cause the body to develop antibodies, but do not cause illness. These antibodies remain in the body and act as a future defense against disease. Each vaccine is specific to the disease or diseases that it prevents. For example, the polio vaccine that your child receives contains the inactivated polio virus and protects your child from getting polio, while the DTaP(diphtheria, tetanus, acellular pertussis) vaccine contains portions of these bacteria that prevent diphtheria, tetanus(lockjaw) and pertussis (whooping cough).

While the United States has been successful in controlling the spread of communicable disease through immunization programs, the bacteria and viruses that cause these diseases are still in the environment. Infants are susceptible to infection because the immunity that mother passes on to her infant at birth generally lasts only one month to a year. This is one reason why vaccines are started in infancy. Some of these diseases are more common and serious in infancy and early childhood. Infants less than 6 months of age who get pertussis require hospitalization and risk death. Hemophilus Influenza type B (HIB) strikes infants less than 12 months of age. As recently as 20 years ago infants with HIB infection developed meningitis and deafness. Vaccinations not only protect your child, but also contribute to the health of the community. If your child is not vaccinated and becomes ill with a communicable disease, it can be transmitted to others in the community that do not have immunity. Epidemics can occur when disease spreads to many who have not received immunizations.

The AAP recommends that all infants, including premature infants, begin most immunizations at 2 months of age. The Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center has an Immunization Policy that follows the recommendations of the AAP. If your premature infant is still in the NICU at 2 months of age, you will be given Vaccine Information Sheets for DTaP, Polio, HIB, Prevnar (Pneumococcal), and Hepatitis B that explain the benefits and risks of the vaccines. You will be asked to sign a consent form to allow your infant to receive these vaccines. Because HIB and Hepatitis B are combined in one vaccine called Comvax, your infant will receive 4 vaccines. There is no risk in giving these vaccines at the same time. The vaccines are just as effective when given at the same time as when given separately. The usual side effects include a sore arm and slight fever. It is important to remember that the risks of the disease far outweigh the potential side effects of the vaccine. You will be given a vaccine record of the immunizations that your infant has received which you will take with you when you visit your infant's pediatrician.

In special situations where a mother's hepatitis B status is positive or unknown, her infant will receive vaccination with Hepatitis B vaccine and Hepatitis B Immune Globulin within 12 hours of birth. This will provide the infant with immediate protection.

For more information about vaccines, the following websites are available for parents and healthcare professionals:

[www.cispimmunize.org](http://www.cispimmunize.org) [www.immunize.org](http://www.immunize.org)

Sharon Galvis, NNP, became CSMC's first neonatal nurse practitioner, joining the NICU medical staff in 1991.