

Counties Column

April 2011

The importance of fully immunising your child cannot be understated. At present, Counties Manukau has an immunisation rate of around 87% fully immunised two year olds. The aim is to increase this percentage to 90%. Recent outbreaks of measles have further underscored the importance of getting your baby fully immunised and immunised on time.

All immunisations are free to protect your baby against serious Diseases that may cause long term health problems and disabilities.

Immunisation works by strengthening your child's immune system. It teaches the immune system to fight germs that can cause diseases. It does this by exposing the immune system to a harmless form of the germs that will not make the child sick. Babies come into contact with germs everyday, most germs are harmless but some can cause serious disease. To develop good immune protection there are a series of immunisations that need to be given over time.

Many parents worry that many vaccines overwhelm or weaken their child's immune system. There has been research on this subject and there is absolutely no evidence to support this theory. Another myth about immunisation is that 6 weeks is too young to have your child immunised. This is not true, and some of the diseases (such as Whooping cough) are particularly serious for little babies so it is really important to get these vaccinations on time.

Even though you may not see some of these diseases in the community so much, they are still around, waiting to pounce. Immunisation eradicated smallpox from the world in 1977; Polio is eradicated in New Zealand although can be found in some parts of the world and Measles is likely to be next.

Parents can help decrease anxiety about immunisations in a number of ways.

- Start immunising from an early age.
- Remain calm and relaxed, even when your child becomes upset.
- Bring along a stuffed toy or blanket for your child to hold during the immunisation, or use them yourself as a tool for distraction.
- Hold your child firmly during the procedure, talking calmly and gently stroking the child's arm or back.
- After being pricked by the needle, your child may cry for a brief time. It is his or her way of coping. Your job is to comfort, hold, and talk supportively.
- You will need to remain in the clinic for 20 minutes after the immunisation. Rather than leave immediately, stay in the practice until your child has calmed down. This will help your child to remember the clinic as a nice place and will help to make the next visit easier.
- For babies, book you appointment to allow you to feed your child immediately after they have had their immunisation.

For more information please visit <http://www.immune.org.nz> or visit your local family doctor or nurse.