

bull's eye

Today's vaccines offer unprecedented protection against a myriad diseases

New Orleans mom Sarah G. Fischer was adamant about getting her son Gibson vaccinated, but laying her sweet baby boy on that crinkly butcher paper in the pediatrician's office for his first round of shots was not an easy feat.

"Gibson cried like I had not heard him before, and it broke my heart," says Sarah. "But I knew it was the right thing."

While it's still difficult for Sarah to hear now one-year-old Gibson cry every time he receives a new vaccine, she believes that immunizations are important for children. She relied on advice from her in-laws, both "well-known and respected doctors in New York City," she says. "After they asked the heads of pediatrics at both of their hospitals and did research on their own, they assured me that getting my son Gibson immunized was the right thing to do."

Over the course of your child's life, she will receive tons of shots. Doctors say these vaccines have saved lives.

"The vaccines given during well-check visits offer protection from infectious diseases caused by viruses and bacteria which are known to cause illness, disability and sometimes death," says Dr. Joseph M. Imseis, a pediatrician at the Family Doctors Clinic in Harvey. He says doctors follow the immunization schedule recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP).

The current vaccines include: Hepatitis B, Rotavirus, Hepatitis A, Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR), Diphtheria,

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Tetanus, Pertussis (DTaP), Meningococcal, Haemophilus Influenza Type B, Pneumococcal, Varicella, Inactivated Poliovirus, and Influenza. Dr. Imseis says these vaccines offer protection against whooping cough, bacterial meningitis, pneumonia, ear infections, sinus infections, chicken pox, diarrhea and dehydration.



The shots are staggered throughout the first six years of your child's life; however, "the majority of immunizations are given between birth and 18 months of age," Dr. Imseis says.

For specifics on when each vaccine is given, ask your pediatrician for a copy of the immunization schedule. A schedule can also be found at: cdc.gov/vaccines.recs/acip, aap.org and aafp.org.

"Over the past decade, there have been many changes with the immunization schedule, and with the vaccines themselves," says Dr. Imseis, "The rotavirus vaccine is a relatively new vaccine which protects against a viral gastroenteritis causing nearly 500,000 deaths around the world annually."

Metairie mom Christy Aymami, 32, knows more about the rotavirus than she would like. Her son, Alexander, 3, contracted it when he was a baby. When her youngest daughter, Grace, eight months old, received the rotavirus vaccine at a well-check visit, she was thrilled. "I am glad that Grace many not ever have to have the illness thanks to the vaccine," says Christy.

While doctors say that immunizations are necessary, they also come possible with side effects, including redness and soreness at the injection site and a low-grade fever.

"More severe reactions, such as allergic reactions, are very rare, but parents should not hesitate to discuss any concerns with their children's physicians," Dr. Imseis say.

Temporary injection pain is hard for parents to see; the unknown is scarier. In the past few years, there have been many reports that vaccines, specifically those containing Thimerosal, a mercury-containing preservative, have been linked to autism. The National Autism Association claims Thimerosal in the vaccines has led to an increase in the number of autistic children.

"In large doses, mercury can be neurotoxic [poisonous to nerves or nerve tissue]," Dr. Imseis says. Since the 1930s,

Thimerosal was put into vaccines to prevent the contamination of fungi and bacteria in the vaccine, he explains. "In the past, a single vaccine vial contained multiple vaccine doses," Dr. Imseis says. "Today, most vaccine vials are single-dose vials," meaning there's less need for preservative such as Thimerosal because there is less chance of contamination, according to the doctor.

"Out of precaution, Thimerosal in children's vaccines has been eliminated since 2001," says Dr. Imseis, and the American Academy of Pediatrics has issued a statement insisting that there is no link between autism and vaccines.

"The number of children diagnosed with autism has grown in recent years," says Dr. Imseis, "but it is uncertain if this represents a true rise in disease prevalence or an increased awareness by the public and the medical community in diagnosing autism. Multiple trials have tried to determine if there is a relation between the MMR vaccine and autism, but no evidence exists of a causal relationship between the two."

Making the choice to immunize your child requires research and knowledge, and Christy insists it's an important task for parents to complete.

"As an adult, I can decide on whether or not to receive an immunization based on the risks. My children cannot make this decision, so it's my responsibility to make this decision for them," says Christy.

April Capochino-Myers, mom to a baby girl, is a freelance writer and frequent contributor to nola baby & family.

flu and the H1N1 vaccines

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are predicting a particularly bad flu season this fall and winter. Additionally, the World Health Organization has raised the H1N1 (Swine Flu) to a level six world-wide pandemic alert. How should you protect yourself and your kids?

Dr. Joseph M. Imseis, a pediatrician at the Family Doctors Clinic in Harvey, recommends that all children, six months and older, receive the flu vaccine. "Children two years of age and younger are particularly susceptible to complications from the flu, but the vaccines available do not work well in children younger than six months," he says. To protect these young infants, Dr. Imseis says that all family members and close contacts should receive the flu vaccine.

At press time, the CDC was starting clinical trials of a H1N1 flu vaccine; it anticipates that it will have 120 million doses available by October, in time for an expected resurgence of the virus. Most people will need two doses. When asked if children should receive the H1N1 vaccine, Dr. Imseis said he couldn't make any recommendations until the vaccine is available.

For current updates on the status of the H1N1 vaccine, visit the CDC website, cdc.gov/h1n1flu