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Vaccination for Children and the Elderly

Disease prevention is as important as maintaining a healthy life. Taking vaccinations not only provides protection against many infectious diseases, but also reduces the risk of life threatening illnesses, especially for children, elderly and patients with the chronic diseases. Between 40-70% of all diseases, are partially or totally preventable, through lifestyle improvements, risk management and prevention.

Once a virus affects our body, we will generate antibodies to fight against it.

Vaccination is a small dose of an inactive form of a germ or a toxin made by the germ.

As it is inactive it does not cause infection. However, the body makes antibodies and/or white blood cells against the germ or toxin. Antibodies are proteins in the bloodstream that attack infecting germs. Once we are immunized, the antibodies and/or immune cells are ready to attack the germ if it begins to invade our body.

More antibodies can quickly be made from cells, which have previously made that particular antibody. Normally, the side effects of vaccinations are very small and temporary, and can include localized swelling, pain, and light fever etc. The doctor will inform you of these before taking the vaccination.

Vaccination for Children

According to the Hong Kong Childhood Immunization Programme, all children from birth until primary 6, are required to have vaccinations for the prevention of tuberculosis, hepatitis B, poliomyelitis, diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, measles, mumps and rubella. Besides the traditional vaccinations, parents can go to a private hospital for a selection of 5 in 1 or 6 in 1 vaccinations, to reduce the number of injections and side effects.

Aside from the routine childhood immunization, what other childhood vaccinations need to be considered?

Chicken Pox – This vaccination has been used in foreign countries for many years, and it can easily reduce the activity of the virus and its side effects.

Influenza – Many experts strongly recommend children from two to six, receive this vaccination yearly during mid October to November.

Rotavirus – It is the most common cause of bowel infection in children, especially for those aged between three months to three years old. Vaccinations are taken in oral doses at two months, four months and six months old.

Hepatitis A – Mainly causes inflammation of the liver. Vaccination is especially suitable for children under two years old, who have not been infected before. The expected protection period can last for 10 to 20 years.

Meningococcal group C – This vaccination is used for the prevention of meningitis and severe blood poisoning.

Haemophilus influenza b (Hib) – It is a bacterium, which can cause pneumonia and meningitis. Children between two months to five years old are at high risk, and it may lead to death.

Vaccination for Elderly

Vaccinations recommended for elderly include influenza, pneumococcal, and tetanus. Influenza A and B and pneumococcal pneumonia are common diseases frequently associated with significant mortality and morbidity. Although tetanus is rare, it is a serious disease that often results in death. Meanwhile, Hepatitis B infection is classified as endemic in China, and you need to consider this if you have not taken the vaccination.

According to the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), revaccination by pneumococcal vaccine after five years is recommended for patients

with chronic renal failure or nephritic syndrome, functional or anatomic asplenia, and the immunocompromised. For those who are aged 65 years or older, a one-time vaccination is needed if they were vaccinated five or more years previously, and were aged less than 65 years at the time of the primary vaccination.

Are vaccinations suitable for everyone?

Immunizations are generally safe and effective, the danger of taking vaccinations is far less than contracting the disease. However, some vaccines may not be suitable for those people with immune system dysfunction or previous severe allergic reaction from the same vaccine.

If you plan to travel, which vaccination should be considered?

If you are planning to travel and the specific area has a known high prevalence of diseases, for example the Sahara District in Africa, South Asia, India and some South East Asian countries, you are recommended to protect yourself with some vaccinations like yellow fever, typhoid and malaria. For more information, you may consult your General Practitioner.