

Talking About Immunisation

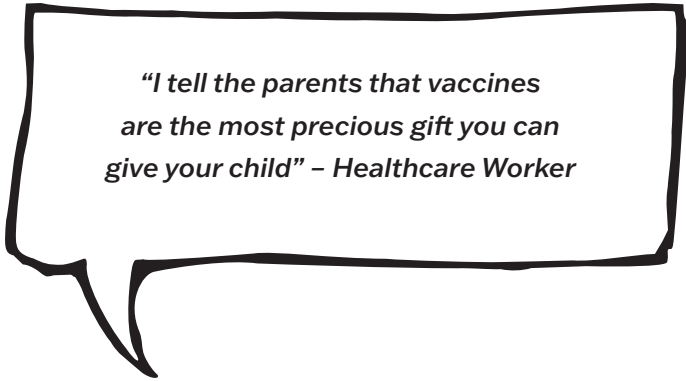


Communicating with your community
about childhood immunisations

A Guide for Healthcare Workers



ABOUT THIS GUIDE



Children need to be protected from preventable childhood diseases and injuries. As a healthcare worker you know that prevention is better than cure. You play an important role! By working with caregivers to ensure that children receive all their free immunisations on schedule you are helping to protect children from common childhood diseases.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic millions of children have missed their childhood immunisations. Low levels of immunisation means that preventable diseases like measles have been on the rise – putting children’s lives at risk.

This guide helps you to:

- Understand where to get the correct information about the immunisation schedule.
- Communicate with caregivers about immunisation and its benefits.
- Address questions and concerns and encourage caregivers to have their children immunised.

WHY DO SOME PEOPLE NOT IMMUNISE THEIR CHILDREN?

Most people accept and take their children to be immunised. Some people are not sure and may have many reasonable questions before they will immunise their children. A small number of people may be against taking a vaccine or immunisation.

There are many reasons that caregivers don't have their children immunised. For many there are practical barriers like they are unable to get to the clinic during working hours. Many people simply don't receive reminders about when to immunise their children.

COST

"I don't have transport money to take my children to the clinic to get immunised."

TIME

"I work during the day and my employer doesn't give me time off to take my kids to the clinic."

DISTANCE

"I live very far from the clinic."

BUSY LIVES:

"I have so much to keep track of with my family and work, I forget when my kids are due for their next immunisation."



Others are worried about the side effects, or are afraid vaccines are not safe. We have also seen more distrust of government and government's ability to deliver reliable services since the COVID-19 pandemic. Even though the COVID-19 vaccine is safe and well tested, many people were afraid of this new vaccine – and now are uncertain about other vaccines as well.

Many people don't have enough reliable and trustworthy information about why immunisations are so important and when their children need to get them.

FEAR

“The Covid-19 vaccine made me afraid of vaccines.”

FEAR OF SIDE EFFECTS:

“I'm scared my children will get very sick from the immunisation.”

SAFETY

“I am worried it is not safe. I don't know how the vaccines were made and tested.”

WHAT IS YOUR ROLE IN COMMUNICATING ABOUT IMMUNISATION?



As a healthcare worker you carry the responsibility to educate and help caregivers to understand why they should get their children immunised.

You can help us reach our target and ensure that nine in ten children receive all their childhood immunisations to provide proper protection against preventable illnesses.

Your role in your community is special because:

- People come to you when they feel unsure and want answers.
- People trust the information and guidance you give them.
- You are the bridge between the community and the healthcare system.

There are three key roles that you play in encouraging people to have their children immunised, while helping to build trust in health authorities and those delivering immunisations.

THIS IS ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT WHEN THERE IS AN OUTBREAK.

● **INFORM AND UNDERSTAND**

Your role is to stay updated on the childhood immunisation schedule so that you can provide caregivers with informed advice and guidance. When we change the schedule it's based on the evidence given by the National Advisory Group on Immunization (NAGI).

Caregivers rely on you to provide them with these changes, as well as information on the benefits and risks of immunisation and common side effects.

It is critical that you understand that low immunisation levels, like we are seeing today, put more children at risk of severe illness, disability and death.

- **LISTEN**

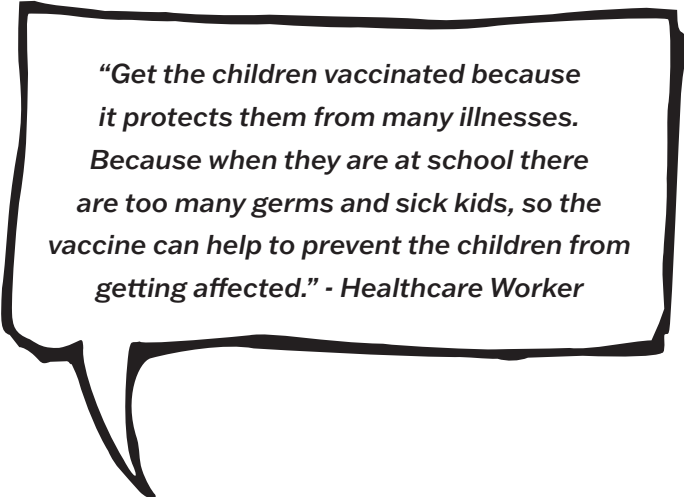
It is important to listen to people and to hear their questions and concerns. Listen with kindness and empathy - by listening carefully you can see what is standing in the way of caregivers having their children immunised.

- **SHARE TO IMPROVE**

Tell your EPI Manager or Co-ordinator about the concerns and challenges you and your community are facing. By sharing what you hear from caregivers – including their ideas to solve problems - you can help improve the childhood immunisation programme for all.

REMEMBER!

Immunisations are safe and have been saving lives for centuries!



“Get the children vaccinated because it protects them from many illnesses. Because when they are at school there are too many germs and sick kids, so the vaccine can help to prevent the children from getting affected.” - Healthcare Worker

DID YOU KNOW?



Not taking, or refusing, a safe vaccine when it is available is called vaccine hesitancy.¹

People who are vaccine hesitant may delay having an immunisation because they have questions and concerns that have not been addressed or cannot overcome the practical barriers to accessing the services. Or they may refuse certain immunisations but not others or they may accept immunisation but still feel uncomfortable about it.

A vaccine denier or anti-vaxxer is someone who refuses to vaccinate because she or he does not believe in vaccines at all. They don't trust the scientific evidence that proves vaccines work. They often don't trust governments, or people promoting the vaccine, and often believe conspiracy theories.

We all have different beliefs, ideas and experiences that affect our lives and how we make decisions about childhood immunisation. As healthcare workers we need to consistently convey the message that vaccines are safe, and encourage caregivers to get their children immunised.

*"The vaccines we have in South Africa have been tested and continue to be tested to ensure it's safe to be given to our children."
- Healthcare Worker*

¹ MacDonald NE; SAGE Working Group on Vaccine Hesitancy. Vaccine hesitancy: Definition, scope and determinants. Vaccine. 2015 Aug 14;33(34):4161-4. doi: 10.1016/j.vaccine.2015.04.036. Epub 2015 Apr 17. PMID: 25896383.

A TOUGH JOB

"I don't know if my community understands how important the work that I do is."

- Healthcare Worker



Working in the public health sector brings many challenges. You often have very little time to spend with your patients, resources are limited, you may face stock outs and many patients can be difficult or rude.

But the work that you do is critically important! By working side by side with caregivers and promoting immunisations you will protect children and help to reduce the strain on clinics and hospitals as fewer children will fall ill. Plus if we achieve our target of immunising nine out of ten children it could help to prevent outbreaks of these diseases that could overwhelm the public health system.



KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK

The work that you do every day is extremely valuable and should not go unrecognised. By taking time to talk with caregivers, and protecting children from preventable diseases you are helping to save lives.

Thank you for helping to keep children healthy!

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO?



Here are ideas of how to communicate with caregivers to help them keep up to date with child's immunisation schedule.

SHARE INFORMATION

Many of the barriers that caregivers face can be addressed by sharing reliable information with them. It is important that caregivers understand that many childhood diseases can be very serious causing severe illness, disability and even death. But that this can be prevented with immunisations.

You can also share information with them about the safety of the vaccines - proven over decades of safe use by millions of people.

You can share information with caregivers at clinics and hospitals, and in your daily life outside work. But you can also work with community leaders to host information sessions at events or venues where people gather – like places of worship, ECDs, schools or at community events.

IMPROVE ACCESS

Many caregivers aren't able to immunise their children because they live long distances from clinics and hospitals, they don't have money for transport or they work during the week.

Perhaps consider working with community leaders to make immunisations available at a local level. This could be through mobile clinics that travel to outlying areas. Alternatively you could extend clinic hours to accommodate caregivers who aren't able to attend during the week. No one knows your community better than you do!

TOOLS TO KEEP TRACK OF IMMUNISATION SCHEDULES

1. Road to Health Booklet

The Road to Health book is a useful tool because:

- It is a record of a child's growth, immunisations, and health interventions.
- It is an information source for caregivers.
- It is a tool to encourage collaboration between healthcare workers and caregivers.
- It includes the full immunisation schedule that can assist caregivers with planning.
- The Road to Health Book is also available as a free app on the Google Play Store. Many caregivers may prefer to use the free app to help them keep track of upcoming immunisations.

Caregivers who don't have a Road to Health book, or who have lost theirs, can get one at their local clinic.

2. MomConnect

Another useful tool to help caregivers is MomConnect.

MomConnect is free to use and caregivers can register by dialing *134*550# from their cellphone and in all languages. A pregnant woman should ask someone at a health facility to confirm that she is pregnant and register. It sends messages to caregivers to support them in managing their child's health and development, and provides reminders when immunisations are due.

Make sure all pregnant women you treat register with MomConnect.



STAY INFORMED

New information and research about the benefits of childhood immunisation emerges all the time.



On the advice of the NAGI, the EPI schedule can be changed to improve protection and coverage. NAGI can also recommend that specific children get additional vaccines, like the flu vaccine, or the COVID-19 vaccine for children who have certain chronic conditions.

We are also discovering answers to the important questions that people have about immunisations almost every day. Make a habit of using the trusted resources below to keep up to date on the childhood immunisation schedule and any new developments.

Health Worker Connect

- WhatsApp 'hi' to +27 60 060 1111

National Health Hotline

- Call: 0800 029 999
- WhatsApp: 0600 123 456

NursesConnect

- Dial *134*550*5# from your cell phone

Side by Side

- Website: sidebyside.co.za
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/SidebySideSA/>
- Phone: 071 412 0553
- Email: info@sidebyside.co.za

National Institute of Communicable Diseases

- Website: nicd.ac.za



CHECK THE FACTS

There are a lot of fake messages that try and make us scared or angry. New information can also be difficult to trust as it's often not easy to know which sources are reliable.

Since the Covid-19 pandemic distrust of vaccines, immunisations, large pharmaceutical companies and public health interventions has grown, largely due to misinformation. But by knowing the facts you can correct much of this misinformation.

How to check the facts

Ask yourself when reviewing information:

1. Who wrote it?

Do a quick search of the qualifications of the person. Go to trusted websites to check the facts.

2. Can I prove that this information is true?

Search online to see if this information has come from a trusted website.



BUILD TRUST – LISTEN, ASK, EDUCATE, RESEARCH

A caregiver’s decision not to immunise their child is influenced by lots of factors.

Within this context it is up to you to find a way to share these important messages with caregivers in a way that they will understand and accept. Keep the information simple and clear.

Here are suggested ways to communicate respectfully and build trust with someone worried about having their child vaccinated.

STEP 1: LISTEN	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Do listen and make sure that you try and answer their questions without judging. Listen and try to understand the barriers they face in getting immunised.✓ Use relaxed body language; establish eye contact. Help to make them feel comfortable.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✗ Don’t judge anyone’s beliefs or values.
STEP 2: ASK	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Do ask questions to understand better their reasons and correct the wrong information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✗ Don’t try to scare people into immunising.

STEP 3: EDUCATE

✓ Do educate: Tell people stories from your own life (and the experiences of others/their peers) about the benefits of immunisations to encourage them. Use plain and simple language.

✗ Don't overload people with difficult language.

STEP 4: RESEARCH

✓ Do research: If you don't have the answer immediately, that is okay. There will always be new information and questions. Find out from others and/or prepare for if you get asked the question again.

✗ Don't argue.

✗ Excuse yourself.

REMEMBER

You may come across people who are angry and are against getting immunised or who are still not sure after you've spoken with them. Rather build a good relationship to encourage them to talk with you again in the future.

RESPECT EVERYONE'S BELIEFS.



TALKING ABOUT SIDE EFFECTS



Fear of side effects is common. Be open and honest. Always explain that the side effects children experience are normal, and usually very mild and resolve in a few days. It shows that the vaccines are doing their job. Also point out that the side effects are better than getting very sick with one of the childhood diseases which can cause death or disability.

Minor side effects can be:

- Arm is sore or red at the injection site
- Fever/chills
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Muscle aches
- Nausea, diarrhea or vomiting
- Rash
- Swollen glands
- Loss of appetite
- Irritability or fussiness



If these happen to your patient's children:

1. Listen and reassure them. These are normal and it just shows the vaccine is working and that the child's body is building its defenses against the disease.
2. Caregivers can manage any side effects by making sure their child rests, stays hydrated and takes medication to manage pain and fever, if needed.

Serious side effects from childhood vaccines are very rare and are being constantly checked and investigated by an independent ministerial advisory committee, the Department of Health, and the South African Health Products Regulatory Authority (SAHPRA).

Severe reactions are rare. These are known as Adverse Events Following Immunisation (AEFI).

Healthcare workers can report AEFI to SAHPRA on the Med Safety App, which you can download here: <https://medsafety.sahpra.org.za/>

REMINDE THE CAREGIVERS

If your child experiences any severe reactions please contact the:

NATIONAL HEALTH HOTLINE

- **Call: 0800 029 999**
- **WhatsApp: 0600 123 456**

Take your child to the clinic immediately if:

- If you child is coughing and breathing very fast (more than 50 breathes per minute).
- If you child is younger than 2 months old and has a fever and is not feeding.
- If you child is vomiting everything.
- Your child has diarrhea, sunken eyes and a sunken fontanelle.
- Your child is shaking (having convulsions).
- Your child has signs of malnutrition (swollen ankles and feet).
- Your child is not moving or does not wake up.
- Your child is unable to feed.

REMEMBER:

Always refer questions to the National Adverse Events Following Immunisation (AEFI) coordinator who will have up-to-date information on what has happened and what needs to be done. Do not seek advice from non-medical people.

KEY MESSAGES TO COMMUNICATE

Make sure you communicate these key messages to both fathers and mothers, and guardians, when they come to the clinic.

*What vaccine was given
and what disease it
prevents*

*To keep Road to Health booklet
(immunisation card) safe and to
bring it along for the next visit*

*What minor
adverse events
could occur and
how to deal with
them.*

*When to come for
next visit and set a
reminder*

*Encourage fathers to
be involved in ensuring
their children are fully
immunised*

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

MPHO THE DOMESTIC WORKER

Meet Mpho. Mpho works as a domestic worker Monday to Friday from 7am – 6pm. Her employer won't give her time off to take her children to the clinic and so they have not had all their immunisations.

Response

STEP 1: LISTEN

Allow Mpho to finish.
Don't interrupt her.

"I know my children need to be immunised but I am scared that if I miss work I will lose my job."

STEP 2: ASK

"I can see you know how important it is to be immunised, let's find a solution. Is there someone else in your family who could take the children to the clinic? Or could you take a half day leave to go to the clinic?"

STEP 3: EDUCATE

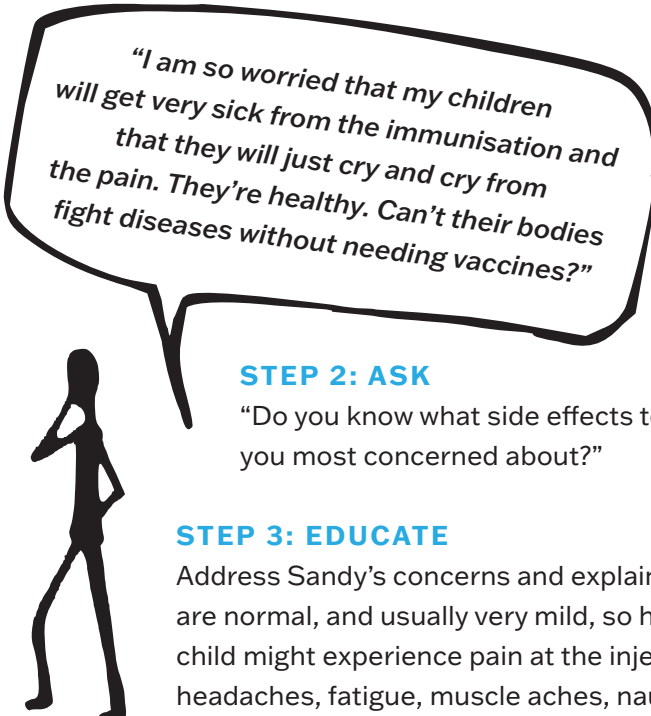
Acknowledge Mpho's challenges and her intention to have her children immunised. Inform her of the out of hours services that the clinic offers if they are available.



"I can see that you want to get your children immunised but you can't find the time. Did you know that a family member or close friend can also accompany a child to the clinic in your absence? Let's look at which option is best for you."

SANDY THE BANK CLERK

Meet Sandy. He is a 35-year-old bank clerk who's not sure whether to get his children immunised as he is worried about the side effects.



"I am so worried that my children will get very sick from the immunisation and that they will just cry and cry from the pain. They're healthy. Can't their bodies fight diseases without needing vaccines?"

Response

STEP 1: LISTEN

Listen actively. Make eye contact. And put your phone away.

STEP 2: ASK

"Do you know what side effects to expect? And which are you most concerned about?"

STEP 3: EDUCATE

Address Sandy's concerns and explain that side effects are normal, and usually very mild, so he should expect his child might experience pain at the injection site, fever/chills, headaches, fatigue, muscle aches, nausea or a rash. Think about sharing your experience with him:

"My children all received their childhood immunisations and although they had a tender arm and occasionally got a mild temperature or rash, none of them had any serious complications. It wasn't anything I couldn't handle with rest and pain medication. The risks of the disease are much more serious than the side effects."



Remember to make sure that she understands that childhood immunisations will help protect her children from getting very sick or dying from these diseases.

GOGO DLAMINI

Meet Gogo Dlamini. Gogo Dlamini is talking to her friends in the shop queue about childhood immunisations. You overhear her saying that these vaccinations aren't safe and aren't tested properly.

Response

STEP 1: LISTEN

Listen to what Gogo Dlamini tells you.
Wait until she is finished speaking before you talk.

STEP 2: ASK

"Why do you think these immunisations aren't safe?"

Where did you hear that from?"

STEP 3: EDUCATE

Explain that these are not new diseases and that these immunisations were developed and tested for many years before being declared safe for use.

"These vaccines are made too quickly; they haven't even tested them to see if they will make us more sick."



"These diseases like TB, measles, diphtheria, whooping cough and polio have been around for hundreds of years. Sadly, millions of people have died from these diseases in the past and others have been left disabled. But that's not the case anymore, thanks to immunisations which were first invented over two hundred years ago. Since then scientists have developed many different vaccines and tested them thoroughly for many years to ensure that they are safe to use."



MEET DEBRA

Meet Debra. Debra has three young children and none of them have had all their immunisations. Debra is a single mom with a full-time job.

“I have three small children and a full-time job. I find it hard to remember when they are due for their next immunisation.”



Response

STEP 1: LISTEN

Listen to what Debra tells you. Have a relaxed and open posture.

STEP 2: ASK

“Have you seen the schedule in the Road to Health book or on the Department of Health website? “

STEP 3: EDUCATE

Explain practical tools Debra can use to keep track of the schedule.

“I can see that you want to get your children immunised but you find it hard to keep track of the appointments. I understand that feeling. Why not use a calendar or set reminders on your phone. You can also download the Road to health app for free. Here, let me help you.”



BECOME A VACCINATION CHAMPION

Here are some things you, as a healthcare worker, can do in your community every day to encourage and promote childhood immunisation:



Create spaces to promote immunisations



As a trusted community leader there are many ways that you can promote childhood immunisations in your community. You can arrange information days at local events, ECDs or community spaces to provide educational information to the community. You could even arrange a mobile clinic to visit communities far from the clinic.

Correct false information about immunisations



Share only accurate information on WhatsApp and other groups you are part of. Make sure you are up to date with the immunisation schedule and ways to promote immunisation.

Share your experiences and positive stories of having your children immunised



Share online with family and friends or at your place of worship the benefits you have seen from immunisation and the experience of being immunised.

Support and encourage other people in your community to do the same.



Getting childhood immunisations is a part of leading a normal and healthy life. Everyone should do it, and help makes sure that all children in their community are up to date with immunisations.

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NurseConnect

- Phone: *134*550*5#

National Institute of Communicable Diseases

- Website: nicd.ac.za



health

Department:
Health
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

unicef 
for every child