



TAYLOR TIDBITS

IMMUNIZATION AWARENESS

Vaccines have had, by far, the largest impact on life expectancy in our culture; not preventive medicine, not medications or evidence based information to treat disease processes, not even antibiotics. Despite the controversies surrounding the topic, this fact remains. In our time, we have knowledge of, but not much experience with, diseases like whooping cough, measles, polio, smallpox, mumps, or German measles. In the early 19th and early 20th centuries, these illnesses caused hundreds of thousands of deaths in the United States each year. Most were children. Families and communities were devastated by vaccine-preventable diseases. Many old cemeteries on farms in our county have rows of tiny little headstones where our ancestors buried their babies. Due to the impact of vaccines, this is no longer our reality in this country. However, vaccine-preventable diseases persist in other parts of the world and require us to remain vigilant.....and vaccinated.

Vaccines prepare our bodies for battle with illness. A vaccination takes advantage of our body's natural abilities to fight illness, by introducing a tiny, controlled "piece" of that illness into our body. Our immune system has the capability to "remember" and repel germs it has encountered before. Vaccines are "teachers" for our immune system. Once our body "learns" to recognize and mount a defense against germs, our immune system becomes more effective and efficient in its efforts to fight certain illnesses. On average, our immune system takes 1-2 weeks to learn how to defend itself against unfamiliar germs. Sometimes, the disease spreads through our bodies faster than the immune system can fight. Sometimes the germ is too strong and can overwhelm our bodies' defenses. In these situations, vaccines make a difference. Before vaccines, the only way for your body to learn to fight an illness was to become infected with the real germ, become sick with the illness and, hopefully, survive it.

Vaccines not only protect you, but those around you. If you are vaccinated, it is likely that your immune system can stop an illness before it starts. You will also be contagious for a shorter period of time, if at all. This is how vaccines protect communities. Even if a few in a community are not vaccinated, the community, as a whole, is protected by "herd immunity". A community well vaccinated is a community less likely to get, or spread, vaccine-preventable illnesses. Inversely, if too many in a community do not get vaccinations, diseases can reappear. This makes vaccinations a public health issue.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has a federally funded program that provides vaccines for children who may not otherwise be vaccinated. The Vaccines for Children (VFC) program distributes vaccines at no charge to private physicians and public health

departments registered as VFC providers. Children who are eligible for VFC vaccines can get them at reduced cost or no cost to them. Our VFC providers within the Taylor Healthcare Group are Dr. Sandra Kopacz, Dr. Jane Maddox, Julie Sapp, Nurse Practitioner, and Danielle Hedden, Nurse Practitioner. We have offices in Hawkinsville, Cochran, Vienna, and Rochelle. We boast a vaccination rate of approximately 90% for the patients in our care and encourage all children to be vaccinated.

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***The information in this article is from the patient information sites for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (cdc.gov), and the National Institute of Health (nih.gov).