

# Childhood immunizations make many diseases rare today

By Kelly Gardner

Everyone who has a child in daycare knows just how common illnesses and infections are in those groups, and how easily and often they're spread. More than once I've heard parents refer to their kids as "walking petri dishes"! We know that kids often become ill in daycare settings, but we may not be as familiar with why this happens and what we can do to prevent it.

Some of the most common illnesses in the daycare setting are upper respiratory infections – the common cold, RSV, hand, foot and mouth disease, influenza and COVID-19. Most of these will run their course without treatment and be limited in their severity. With influenza and COVID-19, however, kids can become quite ill and require hospitalization. These diseases can even be fatal.

Other less common but potentially more severe childhood diseases are diphtheria, measles, meningitis, mumps, polio, rotavirus and pertussis or whooping cough. Fortunately, all of these severe illnesses are preventable with routine childhood vaccines.

The first widely distributed vaccine for children was for smallpox and was developed in 1796 by British physician Edward Jenner. By the end of the 1800s, many U.S. schools required this vaccine for admittance.

The next major step forward in childhood vaccines was in 1954, when Jonas Salk created the polio vaccine. By the next year, Congress had approved funds to aid local governments in purchasing and distributing it.

In 1964 the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) was created as a means of reviewing the vaccines given to children and to make recommendations on when they should be given. Thus, the Immunization Schedule was born.

In the year 1900, the U.S. infant mortality rate was 165 deaths per 1,000 babies. Compare that with a rate of 5.5 per 1,000 in 2022.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 4 million deaths worldwide are prevented by childhood immunizations every year, and that 51 million deaths can be prevented through immunization between 2021 and 2030. Yet it is estimated that 700,000 children worldwide died of vaccine-preventable diseases in 2018. The majority of those deaths were from Strep pneumoniae (the most common cause of ear infections), rotavirus, pertussis, measles, Hib (a bacterial illness that can lead to a deadly brain infection) and influenza.

Childhood vaccines are safe, affordable and prevent deadly diseases that once killed thousands of infants and children. Not only do they save lives, but they can prevent paralysis, brain damage and other long-term effects from serious illnesses that can be costly, painful and disabling.

Routine childhood immunizations are available at most clinics and pharmacies, and many times are offered at low cost or no cost. Call RiverStone Health Immunizations Clinic at 406-247-3200 to make an appointment to get all childhood vaccines.

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