



Immunization is Key to Eliminating Vaccine-Preventable Diseases

The American Academy of Nurses (Academy) has long supported immunization to reduce the incidence of disease, particularly for vulnerable populations. Immunizations are one of the greatest public health and biomedical science discoveries of all time, successfully preventing millions of deaths, contagious illnesses, birth defects, and even cancer. Immunization currently prevents 2-3 million deaths every year.¹

Immunization is Safe, Effective, and Saves Lives

As Benjamin Franklin once said “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” Similar to other preventative measures such as consuming healthy foods, exercising, and getting regular health check-ups, immunization contributes to the health and well-being of all people at varying stages of life. Immunizations prevent the spread of illness. We live in a global society which has an impact on the way diseases spread today. Whooping cough, measles, and mumps still occur in other countries and are just a plane ride away from unvaccinated populations.

Diseases spread faster in communities with higher percentages of unvaccinated people. The more people that are vaccinated, the less likely a disease will be able to move from person to person. That is called “herd,” or “community” immunity. With herd immunity, those who are most vulnerable in a community are also protected against potentially fatal illnesses, such as infants too young to be immunized, pregnant women, those who are immune compromised, and the elderly, because there are fewer opportunities for the disease to spread to unvaccinated individuals. If one or two cases of disease are introduced into a community where most people are not vaccinated, the disease is able to spread more quickly, causing outbreaks similar to the several measles outbreaks around the country during the past decade to occur. The outbreaks in the US have occurred mainly in groups with low vaccination rates.² Vaccine preventable diseases are still a threat and can have resurgences when there are low vaccination rates, therefore it is important for everyone to be vaccinated.

The safety and efficacy of immunizations are vigorously studied and well-established. All vaccines used in the United States are required to go through years of extensive safety testing before they are licensed by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The FDA and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) work with healthcare professionals to monitor the safety of vaccines, including any adverse events, and especially rare events not identified in pre-licensure study trials. There are currently three systems used to monitor the safety of vaccines after they are licensed and used in the US.³

Health Promotion and Research

In the 21st century, there is increased risk for the emergence of vaccine-preventable diseases.⁴ The nursing profession brings vital intelligence, science, and education to the public. At the core of nursing care is health promotion. Nurses have a professional and ethical duty to provide evidence-based information to the public regarding the importance and safety of immunizations. We partner with patients, families, communities, and stakeholders to help individuals and the public make informed

health care decisions.⁵ The Academy advocates for respectful dialogue with patients and their families who have questions about immunizations.

To optimize the health and well-being of patients, their families, and the community, nurses must be fully vaccinated. When nurses work directly with patients or handle fluids, they are more likely to get — and spread — infectious diseases. The Academy strongly recommends nurses protect themselves and their patients by following the recommended vaccine schedule for health professionals.

This policy statement originated out of the Academy’s Child, Adolescent, and Family Expert Panel with input from the Emerging Infectious Disease and Environmental & Public Health Expert Panels. The Academy’s Expert Panels are the organization’s thought leadership bodies. Through the Expert Panels, Academy Fellows, with expertise in specific areas, maximize their analytical skills and networks to review the current trends, research, and issues within their field to make informed and evidenced-based recommendations.

¹ World Health Organization: WHO. (2019, December 6). Immunization coverage. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/immunization-coverage>

² Vaccines: Vac-Gen/What Would Happen If We Stopped Vaccinations. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vac-gen/whatifstop.htm>

³ National Foundation for Infectious Diseases. Vaccine Science & Safety (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.nfid.org/immunization/vaccine-science-safety/>.

⁴ Tognotti, E. (2013). Lessons from the History of Quarantine, from Plague to Influenza A. *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, 19(2), 254–259. <https://doi.org/10.3201/eid1902.120312>

⁵ Lusk, B., Keeling, A. W., & Lewenson, S. B. (2016). Using nursing history to inform decision-making: Infectious diseases at the turn of the 20th century. *Nursing Outlook*, 64(2), 170–178. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.outlook.2015.11.011>