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PATIENT INFORMATION SHEET: IMMUNISATIONS

There are five “levels of intervention” available for preventing and treating disease in patients: Health Promotion, Specific Protection, Early Diagnosis and Management, Limitation of Disability and Rehabilitation. Immunisation is the classic example of Specific Protection and is one of the great successes of medicine.

Children are offered Immunisation for two reasons: .that is to protect them lifelong as individuals, but also to limit the spread of specific diseases to susceptible individuals (particularly the very young children). The first reason could be seen as “selfish” and the second reason could be considered as a “community obligation”.

We are often asked questions about the optimal timing of Immunisation and especially what needs to be done if doses are missed or skipped.

The timing and number of vaccine doses is determined by a number of factors. These include the baby or child’s immunological vulnerability and capability as well as the natural risk of contracting the disease in a community.

In principle it is never too late to initiate immunisations; starting a course of vaccines later than the recommended age will simply have prolonged a child’s vulnerability to the specific disease prior to immunisation

It is never necessary to re-start a course of vaccines that has not been completed:

The correct number of doses has been determined by research into children’s immunological response to the specific vaccine. Booster doses increase and prolong protection. If a course of vaccines has not been completed this can easily be done at subsequent visits. There are recommendations that are specific to individual vaccines and we can discuss these with you. Laboratory testing can be offered to determine whether an individual is vulnerable or adequately protected

Information about Immunisation is available on the UK Dept of Health website: www.immunisation.dh.gov.uk For children following the USA Immunisation schedule, the Centres For Disease Control website also provides useful information about timing of catch-up vaccines: www.CDC.gov

The Child Health Red Book is a precious health document that should be completed at each Immunisation visit. Our practice retains a detailed record of all vaccines administered.

Research efforts are being made to improve on the technique of administration of vaccines, by aerosol and by patch administration particularly, and these will improve their acceptability to children.

A drop of sugar water, and the distraction techniques that we use, help to diminish the distress of injections in children (and for their parents!)