

Too Many Vaccines?

In recent years, a handful of celebrities and books have drawn attention to the idea that we are giving our children "too many" vaccines "too soon." Some critics point to the number of vaccines in 1983 versus the number administered to our children today as evidence that these vaccines are overburdening our children's immune systems.

First, it is important to remember that each and every vaccine added to the list of recommended immunizations will save lives and/or reduce the number of hospitalizations and disabilities in US children. With the introduction of every new vaccine, disease rates and deaths have fallen, often dramatically.

Second, advances in science have improved our vaccines. While children are receiving more immunizations by age two, they are actually receiving fewer antigens, or bits of the vaccine that would challenge the immune system. Overall numbers of antigens have fallen from about 3,000 in 1980 to approximately 150 today. Compare this number to the trillions of bacteria infants are exposed to, and form an immune response against, the moment they are born. Babies' immune systems are well-equipped to handle not only those bacteria but many more additional, external threats.

Finally, all vaccines are subjected to "concomitant studies" before they are approved for use, meaning that all new vaccines must be tested along with existing ones to ensure there are no negative interactions. Because vaccines are given to healthy individuals, they must undergo a more rigorous testing and approval process than medicines given to cure sick people. The Food & Drug Administration (FDA) ensures the safety, purity, and effectiveness of vaccines and the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) regularly reviews new data and research and continuously evaluates the safety and effectiveness of vaccines.

Adapted from Vaccinate Your Baby, a program of Every Child By Two (ECBT):
<http://www.vaccinateyourbaby.org/>

For more information about vaccines at any age, contact the NH Immunization Program at 603-271-4482 or visit our website <http://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dphs/immunization/>