



## IMMUNISATION

### THE IDEA

Every year, millions of children die, and five million are disabled, from diseases which could have been prevented by immunisation against the germs which cause them. Children can understand which diseases can be prevented by immunisation, how immunisation works, and the correct immunisation schedule for themselves, their families and their friends.

Each year, in every village and community, some babies, especially under the age of one, and young children die from diseases like measles and tetanus. Others are disabled for life by diseases like polio. **This can be avoided by immunisation.** Every child needs a series of immunisations during the first year of life.

**Immunisation means making the body strong and well-prepared to fight particular diseases.**

### Diseases that can be prevented by immunisation

#### *Measles*

Pradeep has had a high fever for six days, with red eyes, a runny nose, noisy breathing and a cough, and a rash all over. He has measles and is very ill. If he gets better, he will be weak for a long time and may catch other diseases. One of his friends became blind after being ill with measles.

#### *Diphtheria*

Rosa breathed in some diphtheria germs which settled in her throat and made it sore. Her neck swelled. Her breathing became noisy and difficult. Then her breathing stopped and she died.

#### *Tuberculosis (TB)*

Musa's uncle had a cough for a long time and there was blood in his spit. He coughed up the TB germs which Musa and his baby sister breathed in. The germs settled in Musa's lungs. He began to cough, lost weight, and became weak. His baby sister died.

#### *Tetanus*

Joseph cut his foot in his field. Tetanus germs got into the wound on his foot, along with the dirt. A week later all his muscles became tight and made his body stiff. They took him to hospital, but we do not know if they can save him.

When Vimia had her baby, they cut the cord with a dirty knife, and germs got into the cord stump. A week later the baby became stiff and stopped sucking. He later had convulsions and died.

### Where and how these activities have been used

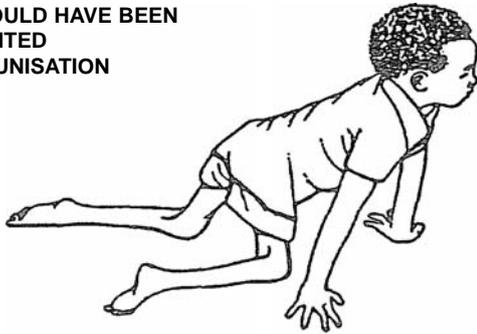
Children have been used to spread immunisation messages all round the world – often in association with UNICEF.

While it is valuable to have children passing on songs and slogans devised by adults, it is even more effective when children themselves create and interpret messages. An excellent example of this is the play 'Disease Defeated' which was originally made by children and their teacher at the City Primary School in Kampala, Uganda, and has been taken up round Africa, televised world-wide and turned into a story book read by thousands of children. This play, which has been translated into many languages, tells the story of a 'committee of deadly diseases' who meet in great difficulties because Child-to-Child is preventing them from killing children in the way they used to do.

**Polio**

Odongo, Opio and Akello caught polio when there was an epidemic some years ago. They and a lot of other children were ill with it. They were left paralysed and will always be disabled.

**THIS COULD HAVE BEEN PREVENTED BY IMMUNISATION**

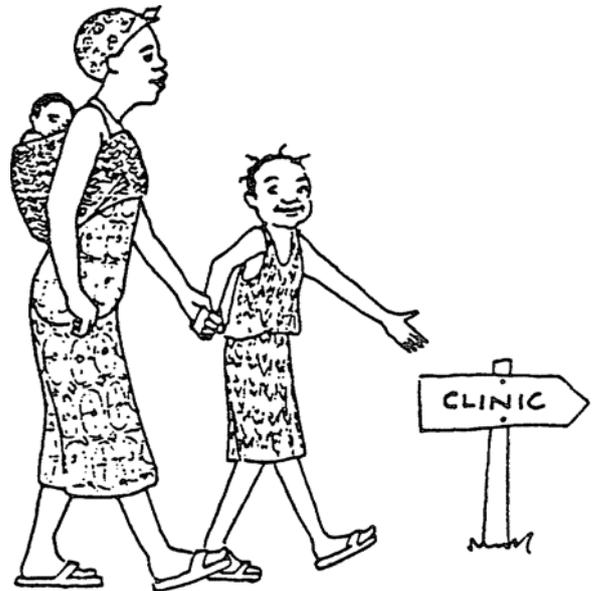


In some countries, immunisation is given against other diseases too, such as mumps and rubella, hepatitis and yellow fever. Find out from a health worker which immunisations are recommended in your country. Teach about these as well.

**Immunisation is a way of stimulating the body to make enough of the right 'soldiers' (antibodies) in advance of the disease.** When the germs attack, the body is ready to fight them.

**Whooping Cough**

Four-year-old Amin caught whooping cough from his friends and gave it to his sister Fatima and baby Myriam. They have all been coughing, vomiting, losing weight and becoming weak. The baby goes blue with the cough and may die.



**ALL SIX OF THESE DISEASES COULD HAVE BEEN PREVENTED BY IMMUNISATION.**

**How does immunisation work?**

Immunisation builds protection in the body against the germs which cause these diseases. How does it do this?

When we are ill, it is because a tiny germ that can only be seen under a microscope has entered the body. The body protects and defends itself by making special 'soldiers'. These 'soldiers', which are specially armed to fight a certain germ, are called antibodies.

Sometimes, when a germ enters the body:

- the body has not made enough 'soldiers' or antibodies in advance, or
- the antibodies are made too late to prevent or fight the germ and the person will develop the disease.

If the disease is very serious, or if the child is very weak – perhaps they have been ill before, or are malnourished – there is a risk that they will die before the body can make enough antibodies to fight the disease.



T.B.



TETANUS



DIPHTHERIA



MEASLES



POLIO



WHOOPING COUGH

A child is immunised by vaccines which are injected or given by mouth. The vaccines work by building up the child's defences. If the disease strikes before a child is immunised, immunisation is too late. Immunisation only works if given before the disease strikes. All immunisations should be completed in the first year of a child's life. Half of all deaths from whooping cough, one third of all cases of polio, and a quarter of all deaths from measles, occur before the age of one year.

It is vital for infants to complete the full course of immunisations, otherwise the vaccines may not work. If a child is not feeling well, it is still safe to immunise them. For some diseases like polio and tetanus, the antibodies made in the body by the immunisation will not last for an entire lifetime, and so we need a second immunisation five or ten years after the first, to remind our body to make more antibodies.

When a child is immunised, the immunisation will sometimes make a small swelling, or make the child feel unwell. This is the body's way of learning to fight the disease, and nothing to worry about.

### The immunisation schedule

Your country has an immunisation schedule against these diseases. Make sure that all families with children know it. Your country has decided the ages immunisation should be given (the immunisation schedule). Immunisations should be given by qualified health workers.

#### ***What is the right time for immunisation?***

Schedules change with new and local knowledge. Know your own country's schedule. The following schedule is recommended by the World Health Organisation.

Immunisation schedule for infants*	
AGE	IMMUNISATION TO BE GIVEN
at birth	BCG**, polio, and in some countries hepatitis B
6 weeks	DPT***, polio, and in some countries hepatitis B and Hib****
10 weeks	DPT, polio, and in some countries hepatitis B and Hib
14 weeks	DPT, polio, and in some countries hepatitis B and Hib
9 months	Measles (12–15 months in industrialised countries) and, in some countries, yellow fever, mumps and rubella
	*National immunisation schedules may differ slightly from country to country
	**BCG offers partial protection against some forms of tuberculosis and leprosy.
	*** DPT protects against diphtheria, pertussis (whooping cough) and tetanus
	**** <i>Haemophilus influenzae</i> type B (Hib) can protect against deaths from childhood meningitis

If for any reason a child has not been fully immunised in the first year of life, it is vital to have the child immunised as soon as possible.

**Remember: Immunisation still helps to prevent disease even if the times between the immunisations are longer than recommended. Also remember that although it is important to be fully immunised, even some immunisation is better than none.**

In many parts of the world, tetanus is the major killer of the newborn. If the mother is not immunised against tetanus, then the chance of her baby dying from the disease is one in a 100. Every woman between the ages of 15 and 44 should be fully immunised against tetanus.

**IN ORDER TO STAY HEALTHY,  
WE MUST ALL BE IMMUNISED.**

## Activities

**Children can find out about the immunisation activities in their community.** Where is immunisation given? Are there certain days and hours for immunisation? What sort of injections are being given? (Teachers, youth workers and health workers can help children to find out this important information.)

**Children can find out who needs to be immunised.** Children can find out what diseases members of their family have had, and discuss them in class. Which illnesses have they had? How did it make them feel? In school, identify any children in the class and in the children's families who have not been immunised. Get children to check with their mothers and report back. If growth charts or other records are used, show the children where immunisation comes on the growth chart. Remind them of the dates for immunisation. Children must help their families keep immunisation cards safe, so that they always have them when they go to the health centre.



If any young child in the class or group, or any child in their families, has not been immunised, check with health workers to see how it can be done.

**Children can keep records.** Children and their teachers can support the clinic by keeping records for all the families of the children in the class, or even if possible for all the families in the village.

**Children can help in the family.** Older children can make a birthday card to take home for a new baby in the family or neighbourhood. They can hang it on the wall as a reminder. The class can help to design the card, so that it shows the right times for the local immunisation programme.

YOUR IMMUNISATION CARD	
<b>HAPPY BIRTHDAY</b> (WRITE THE BABY'S NAME HERE) 	TICK OR COLOUR THE SPACE FOR EACH IMMUNIZATION GIVEN 
WE HOPE YOU HAVE ALREADY HAD YOUR FIRST POLIO, & TB VACCINE	
AT SIX WEEKS OLD YOU NEED DPT & POLIO	
AT 2½ MONTHS OLD YOU NEED DPT & POLIO	
AT 3 - 4 MONTHS OLD YOU NEED DPT & POLIO	
BEFORE YOU ARE 1 YEAR OLD YOU NEED MEASLES	

Keep reminding the mother and father to look at the baby's clinic card and the birthday card, to remind them when immunisations are due.

When the time comes, help the family to take the baby to the clinic.

During the day after immunisation, help to look after babies and comfort them if they feel unwell and cry.

## Children can help in the community

**They can pass the message.** Children can make birthday cards for babies, make posters, and make up songs and dances.

Children can make up plays and puppet and mime shows, such as one about a family where the children are immunised and another where they are not. Or about what happens when someone in the family who is not immunised gets one of the diseases which can be prevented.

Another play might show the unpleasant and crafty germs who wait around for those who have not been immunised. They include Measles Germ (with red spots),

Polio Germ (who limps), Whooping Cough Germ and TB Germ (who cough). Some children can take the part of the Germs; others can be the antibodies.

### They can help in immunisation campaigns.

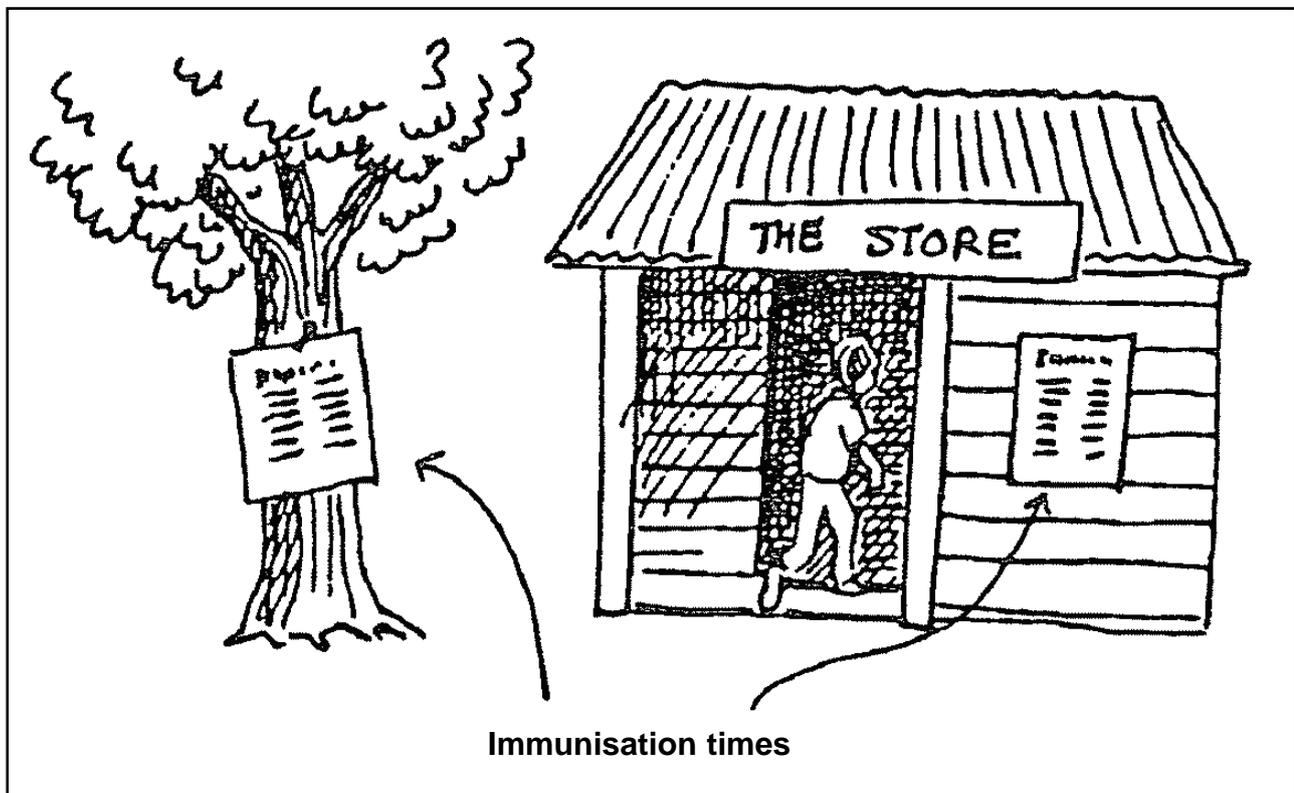
Children can help others to know about immunisation activities and to prepare, with adults, for the visit of the immunisation team or health worker in the community. They can show their posters and plays, and make sure that everyone in the community knows about the immunisation activities.

### Follow-up

Children can discuss among themselves to make sure that they all remember about the immunisation message. Have they understood it properly? Have all the children in the class been properly immunised? What about their brothers and sisters? Their parents?

Children can count how many people disabled by polio there are in their age group; how many there are among people who are ten years older; twenty years older. Is there a difference? Why?

Children can try and ask their grandparents what happened before immunisation.



### USING THIS SHEET

**Teachers**, including religious teachers, **youth group leaders** and **community development workers** could introduce these ideas to groups of children, if possible with help from **health workers**. It is important for children really to understand about immunisation if they are to pass on the message and help their families and communities. **It is important for teachers and youth leaders to give the message regularly and not just once.**

This Sheet should be used together with Activity Sheet 6.2 **Caring for Children Who Are Sick.**