



General Infectious Diseases

Frequently Asked Questions

October 2020

Does breastfeeding my baby protect them from infectious diseases?

Breast milk does contain some antibodies which are passed to the baby, especially in the first few days. However, this 'passive immunity' wears off after a few weeks, and after that breastfeeding offers very little protection from serious infectious diseases. It is therefore best to get your child vaccinated even if you are breastfeeding long-term.

Will a good diet and plenty of exercise help to prevent my children from getting infectious diseases?

To some extent, it will. Children with severe malnutrition are more at risk of disease, and a good diet is an important part of keeping healthy.

However, healthy children in wealthy countries are still at risk from conditions such as meningitis and septicemia (severe blood poisoning). There is also strong evidence that healthy, non-immunized children are more affected than adults during outbreaks of infectious disease because they have wider social networks and come into close contact with more people. There is no evidence that an organic diet offers any greater protection.

Can I use homeopathic remedies to protect my child?

There is no evidence that homeopathic medicine can protect against serious infectious diseases.

Will catching an infectious disease make my child's immune system stronger?

Yes and no. When you have an infection, the body will make antibodies to help fight that specific disease. For many diseases, an 'immunological memory' is then created in special white blood cells called T lymphocytes. These cells then remember the disease, so that if you get infected with the same disease, it can help fight it off quickly. However, it does not make it easier for the body to respond to other kinds of infections.

Weren't infectious diseases declining in wealthy countries before vaccinations were introduced?

Yes and no. With better hygiene and sanitation, clean water, and better food, it helped to contribute to better health. Medicine and supportive care were also improving, so that people who caught a disease were less likely to die. However, without vaccination, it would have been impossible to reduce the levels of infectious diseases, like measles, to almost 0.

Can infectious diseases, like the measles, have an outbreak in the US?

Since the start of widespread vaccinations in the United States, cases of once common childhood illnesses like measles and diphtheria have dropped dramatically. Immunizations have protected millions of kids from dangerous diseases and saved thousands of lives.

In fact, some diseases are so rare now that parents sometimes ask if vaccines for them are even needed. But most diseases that can be prevented by vaccines do still exist in the world, even in the United States, although they happen very rarely.



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