

Final Draft  
April 15, 2010

## **ECHO Questions and Answers**

### **15 Minute Conversation**

### **“Vaccinations”**

**Preface** – Vaccinations prevent people from getting communicable diseases. They don’t cure diseases, but they keep you from getting sick in the first place. H1N1 is a good recent example, but there are vaccinations to protect you from many different diseases.

#### **1. Why do we need vaccines?**

Sample Answer:

- Vaccines are an effective way to stop the spread of some communicable diseases.
- These diseases can kill people, so vaccines save people’s lives.

#### **2. How do vaccines work?**

Sample Answer:

- Vaccines work by letting our bodies learn how to fight disease.
- Whenever a germ enters the body, the body uses its natural defenses to attack the germ.
- If your body isn’t ready to fight the germ, you can get sick -- or even die.
- Vaccinations contain a weak germ (or a part of a germ, or a germ that’s been killed), so the body can learn how to recognize it and fight it.
- Here is the good thing: vaccines have the power to defeat diseases caused by germs.
- For example, vaccinations with weakened or killed polio germs have made almost everyone able to fight off polio.
  - The same is true for whooping cough, measles, and other diseases.
- Vaccines work almost all of the time.
  - For example, most children’s vaccines are 90 to 99 percent effective in preventing disease.

### **3. Who needs vaccinations?**

Sample Answer:

- Everybody needs vaccinations.
- People need different vaccinations at different times in their lives.
- Many of the most important vaccinations are given to babies or young children.
- Other vaccinations are given to children, teenagers and adults.

### **4. Who decides what vaccinations are needed?**

Sample Answer:

- Doctors, scientists and disease experts who know about vaccines decide how to use them.
- They develop – and constantly revise – recommendations about which vaccines to give and when.
- Vaccination is a lifelong process. Different vaccinations are recommended for children, adolescents, adults and elders.
- The recommendations are approved by organizations and experts who know about vaccines.
  - [Optional] Groups include: the American Academy of Pediatrics; the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; the American Academy of Family Physicians; the American College of Physicians.

### **5. Why is more than one vaccination needed to protect against some diseases?**

Sample Answer:

- The body needs more than one chance to learn how to fight some germs.
  - For example: The body needs several vaccinations to learn how to fight whooping cough. .
- Over time, the body can also forget how to fight some germs, so you need another vaccination every few years.
  - For example: You need a “booster” vaccination every few years for tetanus.

## **6. Many of these diseases have disappeared in the U.S. Why is vaccination still needed?**

Sample Answer:

- Vaccinations got rid of these diseases in the U.S., but not in other parts of the world.
- When people travel, they can bring these diseases back to the U.S., so people here still need to be prepared to fight them.
  - For example: polio, measles, mumps and hepatitis A are still common in other parts of the world.
- If we stop vaccinating, a few people with a disease could quickly pass it on to many other people.

## **7. Since everyone else is vaccinated, why do I need to vaccinate my child?**

Sample Answer:

- Vaccines are not 100% effective, so they always leave at least a few people unprotected.
- But if everyone gets vaccinated, it's very hard for a disease to start spreading in your community.
- That means even people who weren't protected by the vaccine will still be protected from the disease – because they won't have a chance to catch it from anyone.
- If people stop getting vaccinated, diseases can start spreading again.
- That's why it's important for everyone to get vaccinated. It's not just something you do for yourself and your family – it helps to protect your entire community.
- That's why schools require children to be vaccinated.

## **8. It seems we have more vaccinations today than in the past. Is this true?**

Sample Answer:

- Yes. Scientists are always inventing new vaccines, to protect against more diseases
- Also, scientists are working to improve old vaccines so they use fewer or weaker germs, but still provide protection.

## 9. Are vaccines safe?

Sample Answer:

- Yes. Nothing in this world is “100 percent safe,” but vaccines come very close to it. We’ve been using vaccines for a very long time, and problems have been rare.
- We also know that vaccines are extremely effective at preventing disease and death. The risks are very small. The benefits are very large.
- New vaccines are studied and tested for years before they are given to people.
  - The U.S. Food and Drug Administration must approve all vaccines.
- Government agencies and disease experts are always on the alert for any potential problems with vaccines.
- If problems are reported, action is taken quickly. In some cases, use of a particular vaccine may be stopped entirely.
- In some cases, action has been taken simply because people were concerned – even though there was no scientific evidence of harm.
  - For example: Mercury [thimerosal] was taken out of children’s vaccines several years ago, even though there was no evidence that it caused health problems.
- Some vaccines may not be right for everyone. Be sure to ask your doctor about it – before you get vaccinated.
  - For example: Some people are allergic to the ingredients in some vaccines

## 10. Why are people afraid of vaccines?

Sample Answer:

- Most of the fear comes from not understanding how vaccines work.
  - It is hard for some people to understand how exposing ourselves to germs can make us stronger.
  - That’s why we are explaining it.
- Some people are afraid for political reasons, or have or religious concerns.
- Some people may also have bad information that vaccines are harmful.
  - Example: Some people believe that vaccinations cause autism, even though there is no evidence for it.
- The best way to get rid of fear is knowledge.

## 11. Do people have to follow the recommendations about when to get vaccinated?

Sample Answer:

- Yes, if you want to protect yourself and your community. For vaccinations to be effective, everyone must stay on schedule.
  - Being late for your vaccination opens the door for germs to make you sick – and letting diseases start to spread in your community. .
- Doctors and scientists make recommendations about when to get vaccinated based on what works best.
- Exceptions exist.
  - For example: Children with weak immune systems or allergies might be unable to get some vaccinations.
- It is important to have a record of your vaccinations.
  - Make sure your doctor or clinic knows what vaccinations you've had.
  - You will need these records for day care, schools, and even some jobs
  - Bring your record with you if you change the place where you get health care.

## 15. How much do vaccinations cost? Can everyone afford one?

Sample Answer:

- Because vaccines are so important, every effort has been made to make sure everyone can afford them
- Low-cost immunizations are available. You can get more information from your city or county health department.
- Health insurance covers many vaccinations.
- If your health insurance does not pay for all of your child's vaccinations, you should be able to get them free or for a small fee.

## 16. You can find out more about vaccinations on the Internet.

**Host reads:**

- We have links to the Minnesota Department of Health, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, and other resources on the ECHO website: [www.echominnesota.org](http://www.echominnesota.org).

## **18. [Optional Cultural Question] Do vaccines ever conflict with religious beliefs?**

Sample Answer:

- Some vaccines – but not all – contain pork gelatin.
- In 2001, the World Health Organization asked a group of Islamic legal scholars to comment on the use of pork-based gelatin in medicines and vaccines.
  - The scholars generally supported use of this material in vaccines and other medicines.
  - They said changes made to the pork product in creating vaccines made it acceptable to take it into your body.

## **19. Do you have anything else you'd like to add on this subject?**

Sample answer:

- Stay on schedule; keep a record.
- Don't be afraid of vaccinations; be afraid of diseases caused by germs.
- Ask a doctor if you have any concerns.

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