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 [thimerosol] 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 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.
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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