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Immunization programs in the US have markedly reduced the occurrence of vaccine-preventable diseases in children; however recent outbreaks of measles and mumps and rare occurrences of polio underscore the diligence that is necessary in maintaining these programs. Adult immunization programs have been notoriously deficient in maintaining rates of coverage.

Benefits and risks are associated with using all vaccinations. No vaccine is completely safe or 100% effective. Benefits of vaccinations include partial or complete protection against the consequences of the infection for the vaccinated person as well as benefits to society as a whole. These include protection from symptomatic illness, improved quality of life and productivity and prevention of death. Society benefits include creation and maintenance of herd immunity which helps to reduce risks of widespread outbreaks and reduction in healthcare costs.

Vaccination risks range from common minor and local adverse effects (localized skin irritation, mild flu-like symptoms) to rare and severe conditions. Recommendations for immunizations practices balance scientific evidence of benefits for each person and to society against potential risks of the vaccination programs. The risks of serious disease are far greater than the risks of serious reaction to a vaccination.

In the US vaccines have reduced or eliminated many infectious diseases that routinely harmed or killed many infants, children and

adults. However the viruses and bacteria that cause vaccine-preventable disease and death still exist and can be spread to the unvaccinated, to once again become common and deadly (polio, meningitis, measles, hepatitis, whooping cough, diphtheria, tetanus, influenza, pneumonia, amongst others).

Vaccines are important for adults and adolescents as well as children. These programs have taken a back seat to children's programs but we are suffering the consequences. Over 35,000 deaths per year occur from influenza (Flu); and pneumococcal diseases kills more people in the US than all other vaccine-preventable diseases combined. Hepatitis B, Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR), tetanus diphtheria and pertussis and varicella all may be indicated. Along with these and the new vaccinations potentially available and those recommended for certain travel, it can sometimes be difficult to understand or keep track of exactly which vaccines you and your children need. Discuss with your physician the current recommendations for you based on age, disease, and vaccination history and risk factors. For the vast majority, the benefits of vaccinations far outweigh their risks!

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