



Vaccinations

Why are they necessary?

Vaccinations are a very effective way of preventing and reducing serious illness. Vaccinations protect the community, as they make it harder for the disease to find an unprotected person to infect. This reduces the likelihood of an epidemic.

How do they work?

The immune system works to protect the body from potentially harmful organisms, such as bacteria and viruses. We are all born with some degree of protection. However, some of the natural immunity that we are born with starts to wear off as the immune system ages. Our natural immunity does not always protect us against all the organisms that can cause disease.

When organisms overcome the defences of the natural immune system your body responds by fighting each type distinctively. It retains a memory of each organism fought so that its response is even more efficient the next time that the organism invades your body. It creates antibodies that recognise the disease and are ready to fight it. You are then said to have acquired immunity to the disease in question.

Without being vaccinated, it may take days or weeks to acquire immunity to a particular disease. A vaccination programme encourages the community to have a better level of protection against particular diseases.

Side effects

Like a lot of medicines, vaccinations may have side effects too. They are usually quite mild and do not generally last for a long period of time.

Common side effects include;

- redness or swelling at the injection site
- fever
- minor features of the disease being vaccinated against

The good news is that most side-effects are mild and do settle down.