

2. Side effects of immunizations and how to manage side effects

Key Messages

- Common side effects from vaccines include slight pain the moment the needle goes in and after receiving a vaccination, a mild fever or maybe redness or swelling where the needle goes in. This is all normal.
- These things go away by themselves. Putting a clean, cool, damp cloth on it or giving paracetamol to lower the fever also can help. Paracetamol should only be given in the case of a high fever following immunization and only the minimum dose appropriate for your child's size should be given.
- All such discomfort or tenderness or soreness at the injection site is minor compared to the serious diseases being prevented through this vaccine.
- Vaccines have been extensively tested by scientists and doctors and are extremely safe. Every day, all over the world, babies safely receive multiple immunizations.

Corresponding FAQ

- *# 9: Can vaccines hurt my child?*
- *# 10: I am worried about side effects that immunizing my child might cause.*
- *# 11: Why do some children have a fever and poor appetite after immunization, and what should parents do?*
- *# 12: If my child gets fever after immunization, should he or she get more vaccines?*
- *# 19: Why do some children get very sick and even die after immunization?*
- *# 25: My husband refused to let me bring the baby back for more immunization because the last time the baby received an immunization, the baby fell sick. What can I do?*
- *# 28: Why does BCG vaccine form a wound?*

Characters

Caregiver *Sofia*
FLW *Elena*

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Narrator: Thanks for listening in to Audio Job Aid number two. In this conversation, Elena who is a frontline worker has just run into her friend, Sofia, who is carrying her 4-month-old baby. Sofia will raise some concerns she has about side effects of immunization so let's listen to how Elena responds and while you're listening, try to think about what you might say if you were in Elena's position. Here's the conversation...

Elena: Sofia!! Hi! It's so good to see you!

Sofia: Hello, Elena! How are you?

Elena: I'm well! I see your family has grown. Is this your beautiful baby girl? How old is she already?

Sofia: She is 4 months old and growing so quickly. My husband and I are so happy to have her, but she's been sick the past few days, and I am getting worried. I wish I could protect her from any harm.

Elena: I can understand, Sofia. I feel the same way about my children. As long as she's had her immunizations, she should be protected from many serious diseases. Have you taken her to the health facility?

Sofia: No, Elena, I have not let them give her any vaccinations. I'm really not sure about this stuff. I have heard so many negative stories, and I don't like the idea of the needles hurting her. She is still just a little baby.

Elena: Sofia, I work very closely with children and these vaccines at the clinic. I understand you don't want your child to be hurt, but vaccines actually spare your child the pain and danger of many serious childhood diseases.

Sofia: But I have heard about cases where the children got sick or developed a fever after getting the vaccines...

Elena: Sofia, I understand your concern. After vaccination, children sometimes experience what are called side effects. This can be some pain or swelling where the needle goes in, but this is normal and doesn't last long. In some cases, children may develop a slight fever, but that is normal too. Giving paracetamol can help lower the fever. Remember paracetamol should only be given in the case of a high fever and only the minimum dose appropriate for your child's size. But if the fever persists for longer than three days, it is likely being caused by something other than the vaccines, so be sure to see a doctor then.

Sofia: So, you're telling me that the vaccines will cause some side effects? Why would I want her to go through any of this?

Elena: Not all children who receive immunizations will have side effects, and even if your child does experience any of these things, please remember that the side effects are very minor compared to the serious diseases that these vaccines prevent. We have to look at the bigger picture here.

Sofia: What is the bigger picture?

Elena: The bigger picture is that vaccines are extremely safe, and they can protect your child and help protect your community from death, disability and discomfort as a result of childhood diseases.

And there are many ways to make this process easier on your child.

Sofia: How so?

Elena: Here are some things you can do, Sofia. Before bringing your daughter for immunization, ensure that she is fed and well-rested. During the immunization, stay

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calm, hold her close, talk softly or sing, smile and make eye contact with her. After the immunization, cuddling or breastfeeding may help to comfort her.

Sofia: Ok, that's the least I can do to make it easier for her. But, Elena, I remembered that my neighbor Sonia's son stopped eating as a result of a fever, and she was very worried. I understand now that the fever is just a side effect, but what do I do if she loses her appetite?

Elena: Good question. If she has a fever or is sore from the vaccine, your daughter may be a bit fussy and not eat as well as normally. If this happens, breast milk is the best thing you can give her. As she gets older, be patient with her and give her the food she likes the most.

Sofia: Okay. I feel like I can manage the side effects of immunization much better now that I understand them. Thank you so much.

Elena: You're most welcome. Tomorrow is an immunization day at the health center, so you can bring your daughter in for her first set of immunizations if it is convenient for you to come then.

Sofia: Oh that is perfect because I do not have to work in the morning so we will see you tomorrow!

Narrator: It's normal that Sofia would be concerned about the side effects that some children can experience with immunizations, but Elena did a great job using simple terms to explain that side effects are normal and temporary, and that vaccines are extremely safe. I think that Sofia was also reassured by the tips for managing side effects. I hope this conversation helped you learn some new skills and messages for dealing with caregivers who have similar concerns.