

what if...

What if you don't immunize your child? While California law provides for exemptions to required immunizations, concerned parents should still consider the consequences of not immunizing their children.



● **Without immunizations, your child is at greater risk of catching one of the vaccine-preventable diseases.**

Your child is susceptible to dangerous and sometimes deadly diseases. Fighting these diseases takes a great deal of time, money, and pain. That's why vaccines were developed to prevent them. Vaccines are very safe, and the threat of these diseases is very real:

- Pertussis or “whooping cough” is an extremely dangerous disease for infants and young children. It is not easily treated and can result in permanent brain damage and death. California had nearly 600 cases of pertussis in 1993, with two deaths.
- During the 1988-90 measles epidemic in California, 2,014 infants and preschool-age children were hospitalized, and 44 died.
- Diphtheria is an infectious disease of the nose and throat that can lead to serious breathing problems, heart failure, paralysis and even death. There is no risk of serious reaction to the diphtheria vaccine. Yet,

several years ago, the Department of Health Services was consulted on a tragic case in which a little boy who had just entered school died of diphtheria. His father had chosen not to have him immunized. The boy was the only unimmunized pupil in his class.

● **Without immunizations, your child can be a disease threat to other children.**

Unfortunately, children who are not immunized pose a threat of transmission when there is disease in the community. They can pass the disease on to babies who are too young for immunizations.

They also pose a threat to children with medical exemptions, including children with leukemia, who cannot be immunized because of their medical condition.

For a very small percentage of children, vaccines will not “take.” These children also are put at risk. The only way we can protect them is to surround them with immunized children. Children with exemptions can spread disease to such children who are unaware that they are not protected.

Recent outbreaks of pertussis mostly involved children with exemptions. In the measles epidemic, students with personal beliefs exemptions were many times more likely to catch measles than those who were immunized.

