

4. The safety of multiple vaccines at once

Key Messages

- It can seem like a lot, but thank goodness our children can be protected from so many illnesses! Just think about how many germs your child's body encounters and fights off every day.
- Vaccine schedules are designed to provide maximum benefit from the vaccines. Young children are more vulnerable to many diseases than adults and older children. The closer children can be immunized to the recommended ages, the better.
- Many vaccines are recommended early in life to protect young children from dangerous infectious diseases. Children should be given these vaccines as quickly as possible to give them protection during the vulnerable early months of their lives.
- Because it takes time to bring the baby in (and other life obligations can make visiting the clinic difficult), giving several vaccines at once is not only safe but also ensures more children get all the vaccines they need. This means they are better protected against the diseases vaccines prevent.
- We have immunized many, many children at this facility and not seen any problem from giving several vaccines during the same visit. In addition, before vaccines are introduced together, doctors test them to be sure they are safe when given together.

Corresponding FAQs

- *# 7: Why is the schedule so important? I cannot always make it here on time.*
- *# 9: Can vaccines hurt my child?*
- *# 10: I am worried about side effects that immunizing my child might cause.*
- *# 15: Why does my baby need so many vaccines?*
- *# 16: Why does my baby need so many vaccines at once?*
- *# 17: I heard that giving several vaccines in one day can overload the immune system. Can you give my child just one today?*
- *# 18: What do you mean by "combination vaccine"?*

Characters

FLW	<i>Emmanuel</i>
Caregiver	<i>Idris</i>
Caregiver	<i>Lola</i>

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Narrator: Thanks for listening to Audio Job Aid number four. Coming up you will hear a conversation that takes place when a frontline worker, Emmanuel, makes a visit to a couple, Lola and Idris, who are new parents. They have heard about vaccines but have a few questions, so let's listen to how Emmanuel addresses their concerns and encourages them to ensure that their daughter receives all her immunizations. Throughout the conversation, think about how you would respond to the questions and concerns expressed by the parents. Here's the conversation...

(audio: knock on the door)

Lola: Yes? How may I help you?

Emmanuel: Hello! My name is Emmanuel, and I am a health worker at your local health center. I'm here to discuss your children's health, especially about the importance of immunization.

Lola: Oh, okay. My husband and I actually had a lot of questions about immunization. Let me check with Idris to see if he is free now so we can all talk.

Emmanuel:

(audio: footsteps, door closes, footsteps)

Idris: Hello. I'm Idris. My wife tells me that you are from the health center and want to talk to us about vaccines.

Emmanuel: Hello, Idris. Yes, my name is Emmanuel, here you can see my ID - I am a frontline health worker, so it is my job to visit everyone in the community to talk about ways to keep our children healthy. I will be happy to answer any questions you have.

Idris: Please come in and have a seat. Yes, my wife and I have some concerns. This is not the first time we have had a visit like this. A few months ago, someone came by saying we needed to vaccinate our baby. Now 3 months later you have come saying the same thing. It seems there are too many vaccines for just a little baby.

Emmanuel: Well, I can understand why you would be concerned about this. It can seem like a lot, but thank goodness our children can be protected from so many illnesses! The moment a baby is born, they are exposed to illnesses that pass from one person to another and are in the environment all around us.

Idris: Are these vaccines a cure for these diseases?

Emmanuel: Actually, they are a means of prevention. Doctors and scientists have developed vaccines to prepare the body and teach it to fight several dangerous diseases, so even if a vaccinated child comes into contact with a vaccine-preventable disease, he or she will be protected.

Idris: But why so many vaccines at the same time?

Emmanuel: Because there are so many diseases that can affect children, it is best to give them as much protection as possible at an early age. For this reason, vaccine schedules have been developed to ensure children get the vaccines they need to stay healthy. But we know that caregivers don't have a lot of time to be coming to the health center frequently, so doctors and scientists have tested them to know which ones are safe to give together. This saves you time and ensures that your children get all the vaccines they need!

Lola: But how can her tiny body handle all those vaccines?

Emmanuel: I can see why you might be concerned about that, but consider how many germs your child's body fights off every day. Everything they put in their mouths and everything they touch has germs, but the body fights off many of them but it needs help to fight some others. Vaccines help the body to fight off the germs that can cause very harmful diseases.

Idris: But are you sure the vaccines are not harmful?

Emmanuel: Vaccines were developed to save lives. Your child may experience some pain at the injection site and sometimes a little swelling or fever may follow, but this is normal and will go away. In fact, there is more potential harm to your child if you delay the vaccines by giving it to them one at a time. During that delay your child might be exposed to the disease and become sick from it.

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Lola: Oh, okay, I understand.

Emmanuel: Do you have any more questions?

Lola: No, I think it's pretty clear to me. Everything you told us today makes a lot of sense to me.

Idris: I agree... (thinking pause) wait, I heard about another thing from my friend. What is this combination vaccine?

Emmanuel: Ah, that is when two or more different vaccines are combined into a single vaccine. These combination vaccines protect your child against more than one disease at the same time. It's basically meant to reduce the number of injections [shots, jabs] a child has to get and the number of visits to the clinic.

Idris: Oh great! Not only is that easier on our little one, but it also saves time and money.

Emmanuel: Exactly! And just like all other vaccines, combination vaccines have been thoroughly tested to ensure that the combination is entirely safe and effective! So can I expect to see you at the health center during our next immunization session?

Lola and Idris: Absolutely! Thank you for coming over and giving us so much valuable information, I also need to tell my friend. Emmanuel!

Narrator: Many parents all over the world share similar concerns about giving their babies many vaccines at one time, but Emmanuel did a great job listening carefully to their questions and concerns, and then addressing them clearly. Good luck with sharing the messages and applying the skills from this Audio Job Aid when you talk to caregivers with similar concerns.