

MY TURN

# Benefits of getting immunized far outweigh risks

The state has implemented new immunization requirements for 11-year-olds, yet some parents whose personal beliefs conflict with the rules may sign a waiver and avoid giving their children the vaccines.

Not receiving these vaccines can be a grave and costly mistake. The importance of maintaining current immunizations for children, as well as adults and seniors, cannot be understated. Immunizations protect us from highly infectious disease that can quickly spread through schools, workplaces and urban areas.

It's true that today in the United States, we have far fewer public health concerns than do people in other parts of the world. Our drinking water is safe, housing is sanitary, and strict laws govern the safety of food storage, preparation and service.

But don't let these benefits fool you into believing that vaccines are no longer necessary.

Seasonal viruses like "walking pneumonia" can escalate to fluid-filled lungs and respiratory failure, both frequently caused by secondary infection with streptococcus pneumoniae.

This disease is largely preventable with a vaccine, but the World Health Organization estimates that 1 million deaths each year are caused by vaccine-preventable pneumonia.

Many fears of immunization stem from the suspicion that vaccines may cause autism or other mental disorders. Research shows no conclusive evidence that the preservative Thimerosal increases the risk of autism or any other behavior disorder.

It's important to note that before a potential vaccine is licensed for use, Food and Drug Administration scientists review testing and rigorously oversee the manufacturing process.

As with everything we do in life, including riding in a car, walking across the street or eating jalapeño peppers, there are risks associated with vaccines. Many can cause pain and redness at the

injection site. Some have rare but serious side effects.

You should read the vaccine information sheet from your health care provider to familiarize yourself with these risks. In the end, you'll find that the benefits of vaccines do outweigh any risks.

Vaccines are an important part of a healthy lifestyle. Just as we monitor sugar intake, limit weight gain, buckle seatbelts or require that our child wear a helmet when riding a bike, we must protect our families and ourselves throughout our lifetimes with current vaccinations.

As you prepare to vaccinate your 11-year-old under new state guidelines, remember that you are protecting their future health as well as safeguarding everyone else in your household. Schedule an immunization checkup today and remember to include others in the household.

*Dr. Andrea Houfek is a pediatrician and medical director with Cigna Medical Group, with offices at 22 Valley locations that are open to the public.*

## Student immunization rules

Arizona requires 11-year-olds entering sixth grade this fall to be vaccinated against meningitis, whooping cough, tetanus and diphtheria.

Meningitis is a serious disease that can turn deadly in a matter of hours. Whooping cough causes severe coughing fits that can cause a student to miss school. Although kids likely received the whooping cough/tetanus/diphtheria vaccine when they were younger, it can wear off.

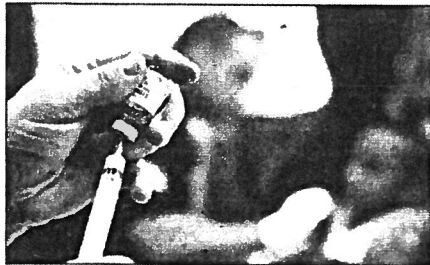
## Information

[www.azdhs.gov/phs/immun](http://www.azdhs.gov/phs/immun),  
[www.nmaus.org](http://www.nmaus.org), or ask your health care provider.



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**Not allowing an 11-year-old to receive vaccines can be a costly mistake.**