

3. Following and completing the immunization schedule (including even when the child is sick)

Key Messages

- The immunization schedule has been designed so that each vaccine is given at the age that provides the best protection for children – the age when the protection transferred by the mother in the womb is no longer effective **and** when each particular vaccine will be most effective.
- To give your child the most protection, your child needs all doses of all vaccines as close as possible to the recommended schedule. If your child does not receive the full number of doses he or she is not fully protected and could come down with one of various serious diseases.
- Even if children are feeling unwell, it is important to bring them on time for their vaccines. Immunizing a child who is not very seriously ill is safe and recommended. Children with a cold, earache, mild fever, or diarrhea, for example, can be safely immunized.
- If you miss a scheduled immunization, bring your child to the next immunization session to catch up. If you miss a scheduled immunization, you **will not** need to start the series over again.

Corresponding FAQs

- *# 5: Do children get protection from diseases from the mother during pregnancy/through breastfeeding?*
- *# 6: What difference does it make if my baby misses one or two appointments? Won't the vaccines still work?*
- *# 7: Why is the schedule so important? I cannot always make it here on time.*
- *# 8: What should I do if I have to miss an immunization appointment?*
- *# 13: Should I still bring my baby for the immunization appointment if s/he has a fever or cold or diarrhea?*

Characters

FLW	<i>Salman</i>
Caregiver	<i>Rashid</i>
Son	<i>Bilal</i>

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Narrator: It's nice of you to join me for the third Audio Job Aid. We are going to hear a conversation between Salman, a frontline worker, and Rashid who is the father of Bilal. Rashid has big dreams for his son and Salman will share some important information about immunization that will help Bilal grow up healthy and strong. Let's hear what that advice is...

Salman: Hi Rashid! How are you? How is Bilal?

Rashid: Oh, hey, Salman! I'm doing well. Bilal is quite a happy and healthy boy. I think he will be a great football player someday, the way he's always running about.

Both: Laugh

Salman: It's great to hear he is growing so well. But it's been a while since I've seen you in the clinic to finish Bilal's vaccine schedule.

Rashid: Oh, well I did bring him at least 3 times since he was born. I think that should be enough. Like I said, he's quite healthy.

Salman: I'm glad that he's in good health, Rashid, but it is very important that you complete all the immunizations.

Rashid: What difference does it make if my child misses a few appointments? Won't the vaccines still work?

Salman: Well, Rashid, the vaccination schedule was developed so that each vaccine is given at the age that provides the best protection for children. In the schedule, some vaccines are split up into multiple doses, which is necessary to give your child the most complete protection. Once a child has received all doses of all vaccines, we say that the immunization schedule has been completed. However, if Bilal does not receive the full number of doses of all vaccinations, he is at risk for serious diseases because he did not receive the full protection.

Rashid: To be honest with you, the doctor explained that to me, but after missing several appointments, I felt like too much time had passed, and we might need to start Bilal's immunization again from the beginning. So I decided against going.

Salman: No, no, an interruption in the schedule does not require a child to start the series over for any vaccines. If a child is behind on the immunization schedule, a nurse or doctor can determine the right catch-up schedule. They will not judge you for missing appointments. They, like you, just want Bilal to be protected from preventable diseases.

Rashid: I'm relieved to hear that, Salman.

Salman: It is important to stick as close to the original schedule as possible, because every day that your child is late for an immunization is another day that your child is at risk of a preventable disease.

Rashid: I do understand that, but, Salman, it can be hard sometimes. My wife and I have to spend the whole day at work, and it can be difficult to find the time to do anything extra.

Salman: That's completely understandable. That's why we only ask you to *try* your best to bring the child on time. We stress on sticking to the schedule, even if the child is unwell. Children with a cold, ear ache, mild fever, or diarrhea, for example, can be safely immunized. Rest assured, immunizing a child who is not seriously ill will not harm the child and will not make the illness worse.

Rashid: Salman, how can I take that risk? What if my child really is seriously ill? I mean, I can't always know how serious it is.

Salman: Don't worry Rashid. In any case, if your child is sick you should bring him to the health center to be diagnosed and treated. When he is examined by the nurse or doctor, they will advise you if immunization should be postponed. By the way, the weak condition of a child who is malnourished or ill with cough, cold, diarrhea, or fever makes him/her particularly vulnerable to other diseases, so that is why it is important to keep them protected by vaccines.

Rashid: But, Salman, why is it so inflexible? Does it matter if I get my child immunized now, or when he's 4 or 5 years old?

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Salman: Like I said, the immunization schedule has been designed so that each vaccine is given at the age that provides the best protection for children. Mothers give their children protection from diseases when the child is in the womb and when children are breastfeeding, but as they get older they need additional protection. Through lots of testing, the best times to give children that protection through vaccines have been determined.

Rashid: So if we miss an immunization appointment because my wife and I are busy on that particular day, what should we do?

Salman: First you might ask a relative or good friend to do it. But if that isn't possible and you really can't go for a scheduled immunization, then bring your child to the health facility as soon as possible to get the immunization that was missed.

Rashid: I think that's manageable. I just have to keep in mind that I follow the schedule as closely as possible until we complete it. After all, my child is my top priority!

Salman: Of course. I'll see you soon at the health center then?

Rashid: Definitely! We will get Bilal up to date so that he can grow strong and healthy to become a legendary football player!

Both: Laugh

Narrator: Caregivers have a lot on their minds when their children are young, so it makes sense that some caregivers might have a hard time following and completing their child's immunization schedule. Salman did a great job explaining the importance of following and completing the immunization schedule, as well as using encouraging language to motivate Rashid to get Bilal back on track. Maybe you can try using these skills and sharing these messages next time you encounter a similar situation.