



Living Well with AIMGA

VOL. 4 - IMMUNIZATION AWARENESS

Compiled by AIMGA's Health and Wellness Team

HEALTHHUB FOR NEWCOMERS



Health Matters! Wellness Matters! Diversity Matters!

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APRIL: Immunization Awareness!



Immunization is one of the most crucial prevention and intervention methods on a global scale. Historically, it has helped to keep millions of us protected against some of the most devastating diseases that humankind has ever seen. Some of these developed vaccines have been so effective that many diseases that were once prevalent and feared are now either eradicated or easily manageable. It is important to get yourself and your families vaccinated because of many reasons in addition to the simple answer, which is “it saves lives and protects future generations”. Other reasons include: cost-savings (i.e., less people sick, off work, and using the healthcare system), the prevention of disabilities (i.e., measles can become a cause of blindness, deafness, and other mental disability among surviving children), and protecting your family and friends, especially those who are older or immuno-compromised ([unicef, 2022](#)). Do your part today and make sure you have all your vaccinations up to date!

Join AIMGA in celebrating National Immunization Week on April 24-30th 2023, where we will be joining other organizations in raising awareness about the important roles of vaccines and the success and impact that they continue to have on society. Thus, this month’s Living Well with AIMGA newsletter is focused on immunization awareness to share relevant and credible information with the community on why it is vital to get vaccinated and how this prevention and intervention piece protects your health and the health of others.

#NIAW2023 #VaccinesWork



National Immunization Awareness Week

April 24-30, 2023

HOT TOPIC:

The Role of Vaccines in Pandemic Prevention



It Takes the World, not a Village

Everyone plays a vital role in preventing deadly disease outbreaks. The lessons that we have learned from our global response to the latest COVID-19 pandemic are sure to help prevent and respond to future pandemics.

Know Your Enemy

It typically takes five to ten years to produce a vaccine which is injected safely to humans in the clinic; however, the short duration (just over a year) to produce half a dozen COVID-19 vaccines is because scientists have been studying the coronavirus family since the battles with SARS in 2003 and MERS in 2013, and fundamentally understand these pathogens including SARS-CoV-2. It is crucial for scientists to continue learning our immune systems and pursuing basic research on an even wider array of known viruses to respond faster (with the production of novel vaccines) in the future because vaccines not only shorten pandemics, but they also prevent them.

Invest for the Long Term

The success of launching for COVID-19 mRNA vaccines in a short period is because pharmaceutical companies including Moderna and AstraZeneca have been invested in clinical vaccine development for over decades and people responsible for approving them worked extremely hard, especially during the onset of the pandemic. According to an infectious disease specialist, Gerald Keusch at Boston University, many clinical vaccines have been studied for 30 years, and only two years ago a product for Ebola was made. The battle against this pandemic demonstrates that advanced preparation has far more impact on a crisis than a sudden influx of emergency funding. This includes establishing infrastructures to turn innovations into clinic-ready treatments.

It Takes a Global Effort

Scientists worldwide shared data and insights to develop COVID-19 vaccines and worked together to approve novel COVID-19 vaccines. According to Scientific American, during the beginning of the pandemic, 1. the early release of viral genome data by Chinese scientist, 2. the vigorous viral research in the UK, and 3. the identification of the first clinically related variant of SARS-CoV-2, all contributed to creating the first COVID-19 vaccine in roughly a year. These joint efforts led to quick and advanced movement towards success.

Obviously, global teamwork will be an invaluable, crucial strategy to prepare our humankind for any possible future pandemic. Funding for several global efforts to detect emerging pandemics and viruses, including the USA Agency for International Development (USAID) Predict project, should be restored. Additionally, enhancing vaccine access across the world by establishing and broadening scientific and vaccine manufacturing capacity, especially in low- and middle-income countries where people there still lack broad vaccine access, is a necessary next step. Scientists, doctors, and public health leaders need to all come together to brainstorm the successes and failures of the pandemic in order to properly prepare for the future.

In conclusion, we need to learn from our pitfalls and leverage the strengths of what went well in the healthcare system when it comes to the COVID-19 pandemic, and make sure we are as prepared as possible for what may come in the future.

Sources: [Gates, 2022](#); [Scientific American, 2023](#)

RED FLAGS

Active immunization is the safest and most effective way to prevent serious illness in children and adults. However, there are some warning signs, or red flags to consider:

- 1 Vaccines like other common medications can cause mild side effects temporarily as a sign of immune response which are low-grade fever, tenderness, and localized redness.** Occasionally, they can produce “serum sickness-type reactions” which consist of fever, rash, and/ or joint pain. This condition resolves spontaneously after a few days. Parents can talk to the healthcare provider or public health clinic for further management.
- 2 In rare cases, severe allergic reactions or anaphylaxis can occur** and we need to respond by calling 911 immediately. Observation at the clinic is mandatory for 15 minutes routinely to identify and treat such reactions.

Sources: [Public Health Agency of Canada, 2022](#)

- 3 Sometimes children are allergic to specific components of the vaccine which might be unknown to parents.** For instance, the yellow fever vaccine cannot be given to those who are allergic to egg or egg protein. Ask your doctor if you are concerned, but questionnaires are given to patients prior to these types of vaccines to catch this.
- 4 Live vaccines** such as MMR (Measles Mumps and Rubella), Varicella, and live Intranasal Influenza vaccine are not suggested for children who are immunodeficient or pregnant women.
- 5 COVID-19 vaccines** are also safe. On rare occasions, myocarditis, thrombosis with thrombocytopenia, and Guillain-Barre Syndrome can occur. After getting a vaccine, be vigilant of the possible signs of petechiae, bruises, shortness of breath, chest pain, abdominal pain, and severe neurological symptoms; seek immediate care if concerned.

HEALTH REMINDERS!

- **Are you going to be travelling outside of Canada?** Contagious diseases vary by geographic region and population, and they change over time as well. When travelling from one area to another, people are exposed to a variety of potential pathogens, which may put you at risk for a number of vaccine-preventable diseases. Consult a healthcare provider or travel clinic preferably six weeks before you travel so you can get the required vaccination based on your destination. Depending on your destination, you may need: Yellow Fever, Hepatitis A, Malaria, Influenza, Rabies, Polio, Measles, Meningococcal diseases, Hepatitis B, COVID -19, Cholera, Travelers diarrhea, Typhoid, or Schistosomiasis. Water, street food, and seafood precautions should also be considered when you travel.
- **Mosquitos live in most parts of the world, and they can carry viruses, bacteria, and parasites in their saliva.** Their bites can lead to the transmission of those pathogens into your body, and even life-threatening

illness. They are known carriers of malaria, dengue, zika virus, chikungunya, yellow fever, and the West Nile virus. Be sure to use bug spray for prevention and protection when you are camping, playing, or walking in dark, moist, grassy areas (e.g., marshes, forests, etc.).

- **Not sure whether you are up to date with all of your vaccines?** [Check out this list](#) of recommended vaccines by age that the CDC released. Talk to your doctor about it!
- **Protection from COVID-19 vaccines wanes over time, but boosters can help to restore your body's line of defense, including against new virus variants.** Book your appointment with a clinic or doctor today. You are recommended to get a booster at least 6 months after your last dose or 3 months after previous SARS-CoV-2 infection.

Sources: [CDC, 2022](#); [Healthline 2022](#); [NACI, 2023](#); [Traveler's Health, CDC, 2023](#);

DID YOU KNOW?

- **Did you know that immunization through vaccination is the safest way to protect against disease?** When you get a vaccine, it works with your body's immune system and natural defenses to respond and build protection. Vaccines produce an immune response similar to that produced by the natural infection, but without the serious risks of death or disability connected with natural infection. The world counts on vaccines to prevent more than 20 life-threatening diseases, helping people of all ages live longer and healthier lives. The WHO estimates that every year, vaccines prevent more than two million deaths worldwide. In the past 50 years, vaccines have saved more lives in Canada than any other medical intervention. Only vaccines that meet the safety, effectiveness and quality standards of Health Canada are approved for use in Canada, and they are tested during their development according to international standards and then carefully reviewed by Health Canada. The benefits of all COVID-19 vaccines continue to outweigh the risks of the disease.
- **Did you know that combined vaccines are safe and beneficial?** Giving several vaccines at the same time has no negative effect on a child's immune system. It reduces discomfort for the child, and saves time and money. Children are exposed to more antigens from a common cold than they are from vaccines!
- **Did you know that many epidemics and diseases have been eradicated by the global uptake of vaccines?** For example, smallpox killed hundreds of millions of people and was one of the most feared diseases for over 3000 years. Today, it is eradicated thanks to immunization efforts. In the early 1900s, before the introduction of the polio vaccine, thousands of Canadians were paralyzed or died from polio. Additionally, a permanent drop in measles incidence coincided with the licensure and wide use of the measles vaccine beginning in 1963. Vaccinations do not just protect individuals. When enough people are vaccinated, it helps protect society.
- **Did you know that vaccines help reduce antibiotic use and antibiotic resistance?** Ensuring that all recommended vaccines are received can help reduce the need for antibiotics. Fewer antibiotics were dispensed historically because the vaccinated population was not getting sick, thus decreasing antibiotic resistance.

Sources: [WHO, 2017](#); [WHO, 2023](#); [Health Canada, 2023](#); [Government of Canada, 2023](#);



MYTH OR FACT?

Sources: [Institute for Vaccine Safety, 2022](#); [WHO, 2017](#), [CDC, 2019](#); [CDC, 2016](#);

Click on each myth bubble to find out true, evidence-based information.

Vaccines contain many harmful ingredients.

Vaccine-preventable diseases are just part of childhood. It is better to have the disease than become immune through vaccines.

Vaccines cause autism and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

I don't need to vaccinate my child because all the other children around them are already vaccinated and immune.

Deadly diseases will stay away naturally if we stop vaccinations.

"Vaccines are available but myths around them discourage parents from immunizing their children. We need to bust myths and promote the benefits of immunization more widely. #VaccinesWork"

Dr Flavia Bustreo, Assistant Director-General for Family, Women's and Children's Health at WHO and co-Chair of the Gavi Board

WANT THE FACTS AROUND COVID-19?

Scan this QR code or click on the link below to learn more.



<https://www.alberta.ca/covid19-vaccine-myths-and-facts.aspx>

Check out AIMGA's revamped Health Hub for more information on COVID-19!



IMG SPOTLIGHT

Nadia Arshad is an international medical graduate from Pakistan with experience in General medicine and Emergency medicine. Nadia worked with AIMGA's support staff team to roll out the Mobile Covid-19 Vaccination Program in South Calgary at the South Centre Mall. She has taken part in various information sessions at the 2022 Health Expo in Calgary and has actively advocated for pediatric covid vaccination, as this group comprises the most under-immunized population. In this role, she was able to connect with people and answer their queries about vaccinations, potential side effects, and future dosage / booster information. This immunization work gave Nadia great pleasure and satisfaction that at a time when fear was at an all-time high; she was able to reduce this fear by giving the community evidence-based information on the vaccine so that people were informed and felt safe, ultimately leading many to get the vaccine.



Skills gained from AIMGA:

AIMGA taught me how to stay resilient in hard times and gave me this beautiful chance to connect with my community. Practicing medicine to help the community heal is my passion and spreading vaccine awareness during the pandemic was a real joy for me.

Advice for other IMGs:

Perseverance and hard work are the keys to future arenas, hold onto them.



TIPS & RESOURCES

- [Benefits of immunization: Canadian Immunization Guide](#)
- [Immunization and Routine Immunization Schedule, Alberta](#)
- [COVID-19 Vaccine Consult Service, SickKids](#)
- [First Nations Health Authority](#)
- [Alberta Human Rights Commission](#)
- [Travel Advice and Advisories by Destination](#)
- [Travel Health, MyHealth.Alberta.ca](#)
- [COVID-19: Social media resources for Health Canada and PHAC - Canada.ca](#)



April marks World Autism Month, an annual opportunity for a dedicated conversation and celebration of autism. In Canada, roughly 1 in 66 children and youth are autistic. Join AIMGA and the rest of Canada in building an inclusive country that embraces and uplifts autistic people so that they can reach their full potential in life.

Autism, or autism spectrum disorder (ASD), is a lifelong neurodevelopmental disorder that includes impairments in language, communication skills, and social interactions combined with restricted and repetitive behaviours, interests or activities. Autism could be associated with strong genetic or environmental factors co-occurring with other medical and or mental health conditions.

Signs of ASD are typically detected in early childhood, with boys four to five times more frequently diagnosed with ASD than girls (PHAC, 2018). Each person with ASD is unique and is likely to present with different symptoms, deficits and abilities. Because of this range of characteristics, this condition is named a "spectrum" disorder, where one's abilities and deficits can fall anywhere along a spectrum; thus, support, needs, and treatment may vary from none to very substantial. It is a complex life-long condition that impacts not only the person with ASD, but their families, caregivers and communities.

There is no evidence to suggest autism is correlated with parenting style or vaccinations. Early diagnosis and intervention can have more positive outcomes for the child. If a parent, family member, or caregiver suspects autism in their child, it is recommended that you consult your healthcare provider.

Healthcare professionals can also educate themselves by using the Autism Physician Handbook. Diagnosis and management require a multidisciplinary approach involving autistic people, caregivers, and the relevant stakeholders. However, those who live in rural and remote areas, racialized people, and indigenous communities do not have equitable access to support services. Lack of social inclusion, life skills, employment opportunities, post-secondary enrollment, and emotional safety are challenges that affect the quality of life of both autistic people and their family members.

Sources: [Autism Canada, 2023](#); [Government of Canada, 2022](#); [Autism Speaks Canada, 2023](#); [Public Health Agency of Canada, 2018](#);

RAMADAN MUBARAK



Please join AIMGA in wishing all Muslims Ramadan Mubarak! Ramadan is observed by Muslims worldwide as the month of fasting, prayer, reflection, and community. Ramadan is the 9th month of the 12-month Islamic lunar calendar, which is the holiest month for all Muslims. From the evening of March 22 to the evening of April 20th, believers fast and restrain from other physical needs from dawn to dusk (except for children, pregnant women, nursing

mothers, sick, travelers, or those with extreme hardship). According to Muslims, this process purifies the soul through the awareness of God, empathy for those less fortunate, self-restraint, and self-discipline practices. When Ramadan is over, all Muslims around the world celebrate their major festival, called Eid ul-Fitr, with their family and friends.

Sources: [Educating for Cultural Literacy and Mutual Respect, 2023](#)

A special thanks goes out to the following members: Lateefat Hammed Imam, Dong Mai, Nadia Arshad, Luz Aida Zapata-Cardona, Naima Sultana, and Eiman Abbo for their additional contributions.

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