Vaccine Discussions in the Somali Community: A Review of Frequently Asked Questions in the Community

What is the ingredients list for the vaccines that our families are receiving?

When asking this question, many families are concerned about whether the vaccines contain ingredients that are *haram* or impermissible in Islam including pork gelatin. The majority of vaccines do not contain pork gelatin. Of the few that do contain pork gelatin, Islamic scholars have agreed that the chemical degradation that the gelatin undergoes is significant making it permissible. Additionally, it is permissible to use products that may contain small amounts of gelatin if there is risk associated with not doing so and if there are no other alternatives. **An example of an Islamic fatwa can be found here** .

Are there specific timelines by which my children should be receiving all their vaccines?

Yes, there is a set vaccine schedule/timeline by which it is recommended that children be vaccinated. You can refer to the CDC (Centers for Disease Control) **vaccine schedule linked here for the recommended timeline.** There is a new resource that lists the translated vaccines into Somali. This can be helpful to you as a parent as it enables you to associate the vaccine and vaccine preventable disease. Forecasting vaccines has been shown to be helpful to Somali families that might be deliberating vaccines as it gives them time to think about the vaccines and consult with family/ other decision makers

Can I space out vaccines or don't give them according to the scheduled timeline?

This is a commonly asked question. While the ultimate goal is getting children protected against vaccine preventable illness, it is important that you as the parent are informed about the reasons for the vaccine schedule focusing on protecting children before exposure and preventing possible chronic illness. It is possible but not recommended to space out vaccines.

Will delaying certain vaccines (MMR (Measles, Mumps, Rubella)) protect my children from perceived side effects such as Autism or Speech delays?

Developmental delay is a common concern for a significant number of Somali parents who are hesitant to give MMR vaccine. Many who are already hesitant might choose to wait until their child is speaking or the age of 3 to give the MMR vaccine. However, there is no evidence that the MMR vaccine causes delays and autism. Delaying this vaccine provides no protection. There is no link between the MMR vaccine and Autism and parents are encouraged to give their children the MMR vaccine as shown in the vaccine schedule to give their children the best chance of protection against these very serious diseases.

Do my children really need the COVID-19 vaccine? What are the side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine? Do these differ based on age?

Children, like adults, benefit from getting the Covid vaccine as it protects against complications of covid infection, hospitalization, and death. The covid vaccine side effects in children are similar to those of routine childhood vaccines and there is no evidence that this differs by age.

What is the role of booster for the COVID-19 vaccine?

When the coronavirus changes, new variants emerge and circulate in the general population. As new variants emerge, covid boosters ensure that we are protected against the variants. Boosters ensure that you are maximally protected from COVID-19 infection.

Why do some vaccines such as the Influenza vaccine need to be taken every year? What if my body gets too reliant on this vaccine, what happens if it is one day no longer available?

Seasonal changes in the influenza virus, the difference between the flu and a severe common cold, and the reasoning for yearly vaccines can be confusing for many. The flu differs from the common cold and can result in severe complications for some if they are not vaccinated. You should also note that there is no scientific basis for one becoming over-reliant on the seasonal influenza vaccine. While it is less likely to lose access to vaccines in the US, it is possible, but the history of vaccination does not cause “reliance” on a vaccine.

How can I bring up questions/safety concerns regarding vaccines with my provider?

Your child’s healthcare provider is bound by law to ensure that they are receiving the utmost care. Answering your questions and addressing your concerns is a key part of the quality care that they are required to provide. You as the parent are encouraged to verbalize your questions and concerns and have them addressed by your child’s provider at any point during your visit to the clinic. After providing a strong recommendation regarding vaccinations and/or treatment plan, providers are encouraged to invite the family to ask any questions they may have. Providers are expected to reaffirm the shared goal of keeping their children healthy and reassure families that they are to answer all questions with openness and honesty. It is the provider's responsibility to create a safe space for these discussions to occur.

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Scan here to see the CDC recommended vaccine timeline.

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