

Herd Immunity



What is Herd Immunity?

When a lot of people in the community are vaccinated against an illness, it makes it harder for the disease to spread. This is because there are fewer people to become infected. This can stop the spread of an illness like the measles or pneumonia.

How do people become immune to a disease?

If a person is exposed to a germ or virus, their immune system works to help fight the illness. When a vaccine is given, it does the same thing, without the risk of getting the disease.

How many people must be vaccinated to achieve herd immunity?

It varies. The number of people in a community protected against a disease depends on how easy it is to spread from one person to another. The more people that are protected reduces the ability of the disease to spread. Diseases that spread more easily, such as the measles, need more people in the “herd” to be vaccinated than those diseases that don’t easily spread, such as polio.

What are the benefits of herd immunity?

The primary benefit is that less people get sick. Herd immunity also reduces the cost of healthcare - decreasing hospitalizations and use of antibiotics; preventing unnecessary deaths due to complications; and, increasing life expectancy.

Source: World Health Organization, 2007