

CASE VIGNETTE: THE POLIO SHOT

Dr. Angelo, a third-year resident in continuity clinic, is concluding a well-baby visit with 2-month-old Beth and her parents. He has just finished discussing the immunizations Beth will receive today.

Dr. Angelo: What questions do you have about the shots Beth will get today?

Paul (father, appearing slightly confused): Why is she getting a polio shot?

Sue (mother, also appearing slightly confused): Yes. Our older daughter just had a drink.

Dr. Angelo pauses, leans slightly forward in his chair.

Dr. Angelo: What do you know about the polio vaccines?

Paul: Well, when I was growing up, we all got a drink. I know that there's not much polio around any more.

Dr. Angelo again pauses before continuing.

Dr. Angelo: That's right. There is less polio now because of the vaccines' success. There are two kinds of polio vaccines: a drink and a shot. All vaccines carry some risk, and children who receive the drink have a slight risk of developing polio. The polio shot eliminates that risk. That's why it's the only kind of vaccine we use in this country now to prevent polio.

Sue (still concerned): Can't Beth still have the drink? She's already getting so many shots today.

Dr. Angelo again pauses.

Dr. Angelo: Is Beth around anyone who has problems fighting infections, uses steroid medicines, or has cancer or AIDS?

Sue: Oh, yes. My mother is using steroids and she helps us out a lot with babysitting.

Dr. Angelo: That's another reason to use the polio shot. The drink vaccine could increase the risk to your mother and possibly make her sick.

Paul: So if the shot has fewer risks and won't make Grandma sick, then it's an easy choice. Beth has to have the shot.