



# Pediatric Specialty Center Adoption Medicine Services

## Immunizations and Infectious Disease Screening for Internationally Adopted Children and their Families

Internationally adopted children are at increased risk of lacking some routine childhood immunizations and having certain infectious diseases compared with American born children.

- US immigration law requires that internationally adopted children begin immunizations within 30 days of arrival in the US.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends a comprehensive health assessment within the first 2 weeks of arrival.

Families are highly motivated to begin this process but also anxious about exposing their new child to this stressful and potentially painful process so soon after arrival. Families may have heard conflicting information about the status of immunizations in their child's birth country and may have concerns about adverse events after immunization.

We regard immunizations as a high priority for all children, especially immigrant and internationally adopted children, who may be lacking vaccines given routinely in the US. Not only are these children at risk of contracting vaccine preventable disease, the family members of internationally adopted children are at risk as well of contracting the disease from these children. Some of the infections that these children may carry and thus transmit are Tuberculosis, Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, Pertussis, Measles, Syphilis, HIV and intestinal parasitic diseases.

Adoptee families need counseling before and after travel overseas to prevent these infections. Some of the non-infectious illnesses that may be carried are anemia, rickets, hypothyroidism, iodine deficiency and alcohol related birth defects.

## We at our Adoption and Travel Medicine Office here, provide:



### *Before the acceptance of the adoption:*

1. Assessment of lab work and immunization records of the “to be adopted” child brought in by parents before the acceptance of the adoption.
  - a. Medical abstract studied and evaluated. Medical abstract which may include medical diagnoses is explained in layman terms.
  - b. Growth parameters are placed on a growth curve to assess height, weight, head circumference as compared to a general population of children of the same age.
  - c. Developmental milestones are discussed so parents can understand the expectations for their particular child. Parents can then more comfortably make decisions regarding their prospective adoption.
  - d. Photographs are examined for abnormal physical characteristics.
  - e. Videos when available are viewed and studied for abnormal physical characteristics and developmental/behavioral level.
2. After pre-reviewing available medical records, growth data, and photos/videos a phone discussion that takes you in detail through the available information and your concerns or a face to face meeting can be arranged. Our consultation will focus on notable growth trends, explanations of foreign medical diagnoses with opinions on which are more or less worrisome, and assessment of developmental progress.
3. We will then send you a "wish list" of follow-up questions that you can forward to your agency and/or bring with you when you travel. We are happy to review any **follow-up information**.

### *Before travel by the adoptee family to international destination for bringing the child:*

1. Pre travel counseling and prophylactic immunizations to family members for prevention of infectious health problems tailored to their destination of travel.

### *After the arrival of the child to the US:*

1. Review of all health documents brought in with the child from the country of origin, and initial health assessment of the adopted child within 2 weeks of arrival into the US.
2. A systematic approach to screening of infectious diseases combined with assessment of signs and symptoms that could be related to diseases prevalent in the child’s country of origin support’s children’s long-term health and that of their new families.
3. Recommendations regarding necessary laboratory work and immunizations and treatment of infectious diseases in the adopted child.



### **Falguni Shah, MD**

Dr. Shah is a board-certified physician in Pediatrics and Pediatric Infectious Diseases. She received her medical degree from BJ Medical College in India and thereafter, completed her residency in Pediatrics and a fellowship in Pediatric Infectious Diseases at the Children’s Hospital of Montefiore, Albert Einstein College of Medicine, N.Y. She is a member of the Pediatric Infectious Disease Society of America.

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