

# Somali Family's Conversation about Immunizations



# Acknowledgements

This book was created by the Somali Health Board's research team members Anisa Ibrahim, MD, Ahmed Abdille Ali, PharmD, and Farah Mohamed, MPH, MSW with funding from the Group Health Foundation. Illustrations were done by Isabelle Celentano.

We would like to thank the following individuals who reviewed this book for content and clarity and provided feedback:

- Asli Ashkir, MPH, PHN, RN
- Meredith Li-Vollmer, Risk Communication Specialist - Public Health Seattle & King County



**GROUP HEALTH**  
FOUNDATION

# SCENE ONE

Halima just returned from a clinic visit where her child received a vaccination. She is meeting her friend Sadiya for prayer.



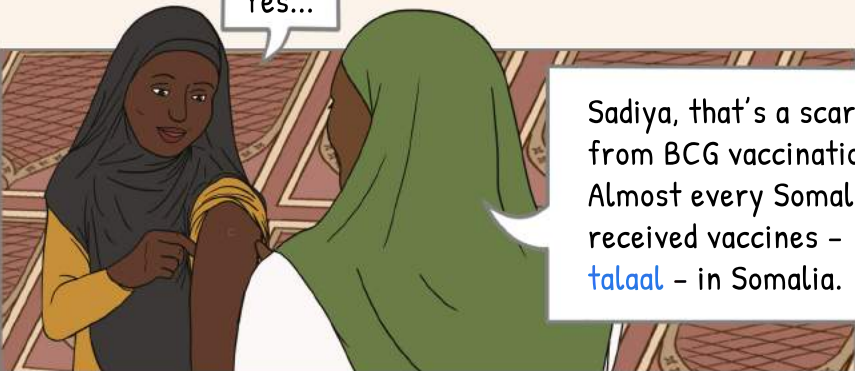
In Somalia kids did fine without immunizations, why are they always pushing us to vaccinate here?



It's interesting that you say that. Can I see your left arm? Do you have a large circular marking?



Yes...



Sadiya, that's a scar from BCG vaccination! Almost every Somali received vaccines - **talaal** - in Somalia.




We were protected by vaccines against diseases, we need to do the same for our children.


But Halima, I'm just not sure how these vaccines work or what they do.



I know a little, but let's give Dr. Anisa a call, I think I have her phone number.



Hello Dr. Anisa, this is mama Halima. I'm here with Sadiya and we have been arguing about vaccines. Can you give us a few minutes of your time today?




Of course, I am happy to. Where should we start?

First, can you tell her what vaccines do?

Sure, vaccines help prevent disease in your body by imitating an infection, but this imitation doesn't cause an illness.

Instead it causes the immune system to develop the same response as it does to a real infection so the body can recognize and fight the vaccine-preventable disease in the future.

Sometimes, after getting a vaccine, the imitation infection can cause minor symptoms, such as fever. Such minor symptoms are normal and should be expected as the body builds immunity.



OK, I understand that but how does injecting you with something protect your body?

It's prevention! **Ka hor tag.**



Yes that's right. It's like training soldiers for a battle. Vaccines train your body to fight against the real disease by imitating the disease.



What diseases are these?  
Are these new diseases?

No. You have heard of many of these diseases. They include measles, polio, pertussis, Tetanus, and others.

Really?! I thought these were new diseases that we encountered in America.



I didn't know they were the same diseases that we saw in Somalia.



I tried telling her! The one thing I don't know is why we start giving vaccines so early?



Great question! We give vaccines when kids are most at risk for getting the disease and when their immune system isn't as strong.

Thank you for your help, Dr. Anisa.

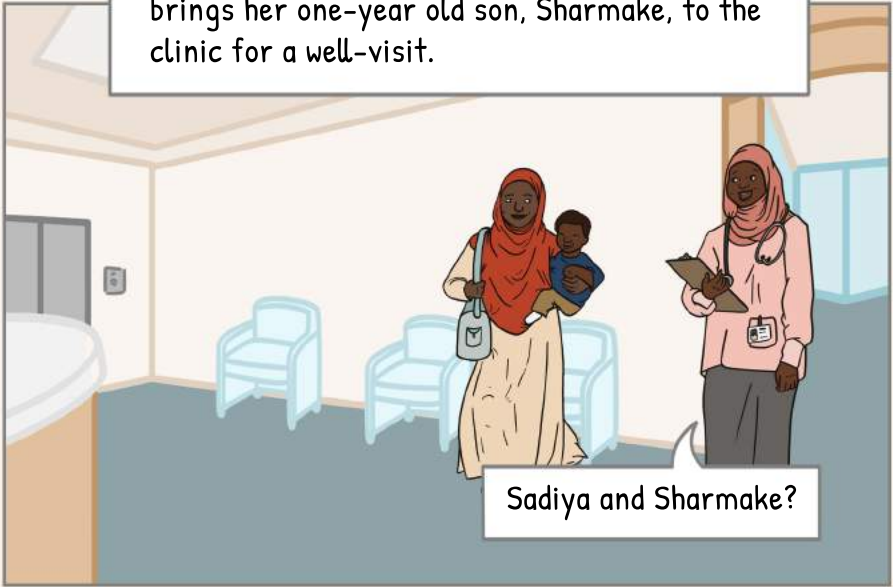


I hope I answered all of your questions. Please feel free to call the clinic anytime if you would like to discuss.

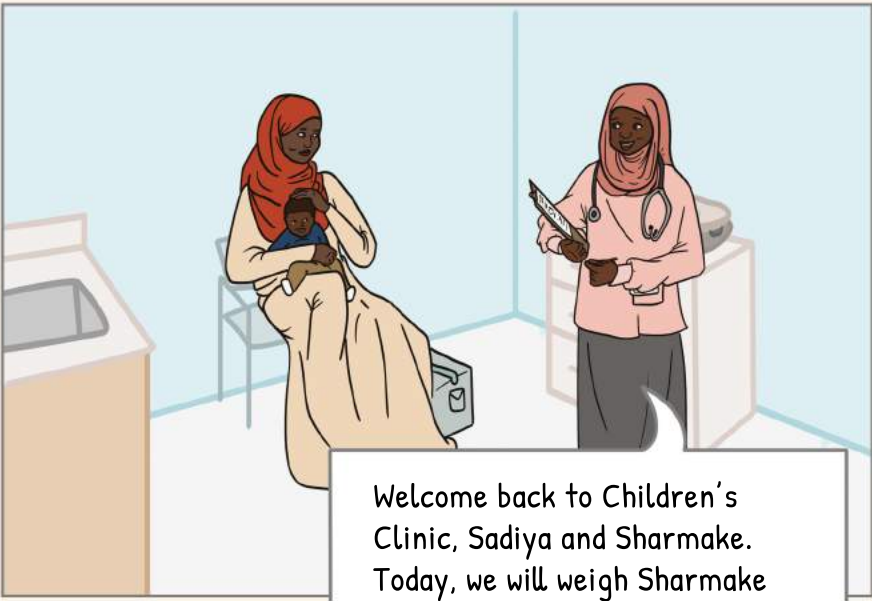


# SCENE TWO

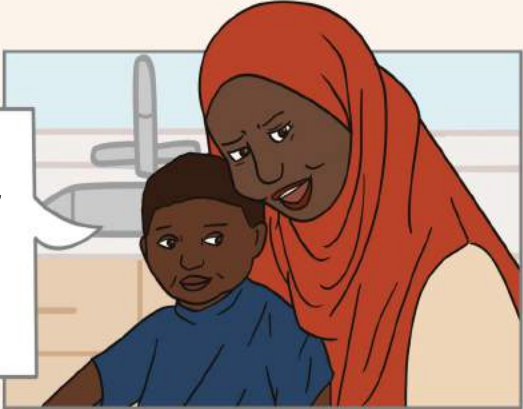
The day after speaking with Dr. Anisa, Sadiya brings her one-year old son, Sharmake, to the clinic for a well-visit.




Sadiya and Sharmake?




Welcome back to Children's Clinic, Sadiya and Sharmake. Today, we will weigh Sharmake and take his height. He will also receive 5 vaccinations.



Five shots?? Isn't that too many? My child is too young for 5 shots at one time.



Actually, it is safe to give them all today. There is no harm in giving the vaccines together.



Does this include the one that causes kids to stop talking? I mean the one that has three letters... MMQ? MMG?

Do you mean MMR?

Yes, that's the one. Everyone is avoiding that one.

MMR has not been associated with any disease that changes speech or development. It is a safe and effective vaccine that has been around for a long time.



I'll have Dr. Anisa come and answer any additional questions you may have about this particular vaccination.

Do you have any other questions or concerns today?

No thank you, I'll wait for the doctor now.



Dr. Anisa will be here soon. I'll weigh Sharmake in the meantime.



Salaam aleykum Sadiya! It's great to see you and Sharmake. Look at Sharmake, he's grown so much since I last saw him.

I heard you have a few more questions about vaccines?



Yes, thank you for taking my call the other day and answering some of my concerns.

Of course. I'm here to answer any questions you may have.

I have to be honest, my only concern is about the MMR vaccine. I'm a little nervous about it. And why so many vaccinations at one time?



I understand your concerns, however, all of these vaccines are safe to give together. We give these vaccines together because the children need protection from these diseases at this age.



Sharmake comes into contact with more germs by touching his mouth after playing at the playground.



Oh I did not know that. It just seems like so many pokes to give a baby.



I know it's hard to watch your baby in pain from a shot. But this is temporary pain that will resolve quickly for something that will protect your child for a long time.



Ok I understand that now. But I still do not want to give the MMR shot, I don't want to give something to my child that may harm them.

We all want what's best for our kids and I share that same goal with you. There have been multiple studies that show that MMR is safe and not associated with speech delay or autism.



So, what do you think?



# SCENE THREE



One week later, Sadiya is drinking tea with her husband and mother.



Last week, I gave Sharmake his shots. He received five shots and did really well. Alhamdulillah.

Why did you give him that many shots at once?! Aren't you afraid he will get sick??



You know, the doctor told me that he won't get sick from the vaccines. He just had a little redness on his thighs and it went away.

The materials in the vaccines are actually not capable of making you sick.



It seems like you have thought about this and made a good decision. I am with you on this.

Well, have you ever asked the Imam about these vaccines? If we are giving them to our children, we need to know they are halal.



Yes, I heard him talk about it before, but we can call him now.

Asalamu calaykum Sh Ahmed Noor. I am calling because I have a question about vaccines. Are they halal?



This is a good question. Our faith teaches us that we have to protect our bodies and health. Vaccines are halal. Every vaccine has multiple options that you can discuss with your doctor.



That's good to hear, I just told my mother this and she wanted to make sure. Thank you.

## A Message From the SHB Team

Every parent wants the best for their children and their well being. We would like to empower all parents to utilize their rights in being educated and informed about their children's health care including immunizations. Vaccines have been proven to be safe and effective. It is your right as a parent to have active dialogue with your medical providers regarding vaccines and have all your questions answered. Prevention is always better than cure.