

IMMUNIZATION AWARENESS

Childhood immunization has been called our society's greatest health care achievement and has helped children stay healthy for more than 50 years. Some diseases that once injured or killed thousands of children have been eliminated completely and others are close to being eradicated.

WHAT TO KNOW

A vaccine is a dead, or weakened version, or part of the germ that causes the disease in question. When children are exposed to a disease in the form of a vaccine, their immune system, which is the body's germ-fighting machine, is able to build up antibodies that protect them from contracting the disease if and when they are exposed to the actual disease.

Recommendations for vaccines to be given to children are made only after a long and careful review by scientists, doctors, and healthcare professionals. Over the years, vaccines have generated controversy over their safety. However, the most comprehensive scientific studies and reviews have not found a link between vaccines and serious conditions such as autism. Groups of experts, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Institute of Medicine (IOM), the National Institute of Health (NIM), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other agencies also state that vaccines are not responsible for the number of children now recognized to have autism spectrum disorder.

IMMUNIZATIONS RECOMMENDED BY AGE 2

- Three vaccinations for hepatitis B (HepB)
- Two to three vaccinations for rotavirus, a type of infection that causes severe diarrhea
- Four vaccinations for diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis (DPT)
- Four vaccinations for Haemophilus influenza type B (Hib), a common upper respiratory infection that can also cause meningitis
- Three inactivated polio virus vaccinations (IPV)
- Four vaccinations for pneumococcal disease, a common cause of ear infections, pneumonia, and meningitis
- One vaccination for measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) at 12 to 15 months
- One vaccination for varicella (chickenpox) no earlier than age 12 months and only if your child does not develop chickenpox on his/her own
- Start a two-dose series of Hepatitis A (HepA) vaccine at 12 to 23 months with the two doses separated by 6 to 18 months

Common side effects of immunizations include swelling at the site of the injection, hives, soreness, fussiness, and fever. Discuss these side effects with your doctor and ask what symptoms deserve an office call.

From age 4 to 6, your child will need booster shots for DPT, IPV, MMR, and chickenpox. Children should also start receiving a yearly flu shot after age 6 months.

Preteens and teens (11 to 19 years of age) will need additional vaccinations, such as human papillomavirus (HPV) and meningococcal vaccines. Therefore, check with your family doctor especially if you have a child going away to college.

CAN ALL CHILDREN BE IMMUNIZED

Some children may not be able to receive vaccinations due to allergies, illness, weakened immune systems, taking oral or injected steroids for lung or kidney conditions, or other reasons, such as undergoing treatment for cancer. To help keep these individuals safe, it is important that those who are able to get vaccinated are fully immunized. This not only protects your family, but also helps prevent the spread of diseases to your friends, loved ones, and the community.

ARE VACCINES STILL NEEDED IF THE DISEASES ARE NOT AS COMMON ANYMORE?

Diseases are less common in the United States in large part due to vaccines. If vaccines were not given, the bacteria and viruses that cause these diseases could begin to infect more and more children again. Because diseases may be brought into the United States by Americans who travel abroad or by people visiting from areas with current disease outbreaks, it is important that your child is vaccinated.

KEEPING TRACK OF IMMUNIZATIONS

Most of your child's vaccinations are completed between birth and six years of age. Many vaccines are given more than once at different ages, and in combinations. This means that you will need to keep a careful record of your child's shots. Although your doctor's office will also keep track, people change doctors, families move, and records get lost. Ultimately it is the parents/guardians responsibility for keeping accurate/up-to-date records of your child's immunizations. Parents need to be aware that many states will not allow a child to start school without a complete immunization record.

Vaccines are some of the safest and most effective preventive medicines we have, and they have made many dangerous childhood diseases rare today. Along with the advances in medical science, your child can be protected against even more diseases than ever before.

The National PTA supports the efforts of schools to enforce immunization laws and encourages each State Education Agency to require certification of immunizations to prevent communicable disease as a condition of entry into public and non-public schools, preschools, and child care facilities. The National PTA recognizes the need to provide provisions for exemptions for medical or religious reasons.

RESOURCES TO CONTACT & ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

American Academy of Pediatrics (<http://www.aap.org/immunization/>)
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines>)
Institute of Medicine – Vaccinate Your Baby
(<http://www.vaccinateyourbaby.org>)
U.S. National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health
(<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/childhoodimmunization.html>)