

ARE YOU READY?



Staying healthy, preventing disease: Vaccines for kids

We all want our children to have a healthy start in life. Making sure they're immunized against vaccine-preventable diseases is one of the best ways to make that happen.

Why are vaccines important?

Babies and very young children can be particularly susceptible to diseases and their complications. Fortunately, vaccines are available to protect infants and toddlers from more than a dozen serious diseases.

The United States has been successful in reducing many infectious diseases. But disease outbreaks still happen. For example, outbreaks of diseases such as measles, whooping cough and mumps – all of which can be prevented by vaccines – still occur in the United States. That's why it's so important to learn about recommended vaccination schedules and talk about them with your pediatrician.

Today, recommended childhood vaccines protect your young ones against a long list of diseases, including the flu, hepatitis A, hepatitis B, measles, mumps, rubella, polio, chickenpox, rotavirus, diphtheria, tetanus, pneumococcal disease and pertussis (also known as whooping cough).

Many of these diseases are extremely serious and can cause lifelong health problems or death. Some childhood immunizations require multiple doses between birth and age 6. Not getting all of the doses of a recommended vaccine can leave your child vulnerable to disease. Ask your doctor for the full recommended childhood vaccination schedule.

Some parents worry about the number of vaccines a child is recommended to receive between birth and age 6. But there is no need to worry: Studies have shown that even for newborns, receiving several vaccines at once is safe.



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Risks of not vaccinating

Fortunately, most parents decide to vaccinate their children. If you are wary of vaccinating your child, think about your decision carefully. Not vaccinating your child not only leaves her or him vulnerable to dangerous diseases, but threatens the health of fellow children who are either too young to be vaccinated or have not been fully immunized. Vaccines are overwhelmingly safer than the diseases they prevent.

Vaccines are created using the highest safety standards, and years of testing are required before a vaccine is available for use. But like most medical procedures and treatments, vaccines can also have side effects. In most cases, there are either no side effects or a mild reaction, such as a fever. If you believe your child is having a negative reaction to a vaccine, contact your health care provider.

Some people are concerned that vaccines cause autism. There is no evidence to support this. Scientific studies have found no relationship between vaccines and autism.



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Get involved



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While your pediatrician may keep track of your child's vaccination schedule and alert you when immunizations are needed, it's a good idea for you to keep track as well. Parents are responsible for providing schools with required vaccination records, so it's good to have your own copies.

As a parent or caregiver, make sure you're immunized too so you don't pass along diseases to young children. For example, staying immunized against pertussis, commonly known as whooping cough, requires a booster shot later in life to maintain your immunity. For adults, getting pertussis may seem like nothing more than having a cold. However, the disease can cause serious problems if it's passed along to an infant who has yet to be vaccinated against the disease.

If you can't afford to have your child vaccinated, contact your local health department and ask about programs that provide vaccines at no cost to eligible children.



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