

Immunize your child

As a parent, the best way to ensure your child's good health is to try to prevent illness before it starts. And the best way to prevent a number of serious illnesses, such as measles, mumps, rubella, hepatitis B, and chickenpox, among others, is to make sure your children receive appropriate immunizations.

The most common immunizations are called **vaccinations**. Currently there are 10 vaccine-preventable diseases your child should be protected against. In most cases, the vaccines are delivered by injection ("shots") and several shots are needed for full protection. Children

receive these injections between birth and age 2 years. For some diseases, "booster" shots are needed between the ages of 4 and 6, and again between ages 11 and 12.

Every state requires proof of immunization before a child can start school. However, state-specific immunization laws may permit certain exemptions, such as for medical, religious, or philosophical reasons. A study in the July 7, 1999, issue of *JAMA* reports that children aged 5 to 19 who were exempted from immunization were 35 times more likely to contract measles than immunized children.

TYPES OF VACCINES:

- **HBV** – Protects against **hepatitis B** (liver infection)
- **DTaP** – Protects against **diphtheria** (severe infection of the throat and respiratory tract), **tetanus** (or "lockjaw", a serious neurological disorder that may occur from a contaminated wound), and **pertussis** (whooping cough)
- **Hib** – Protects against *Haemophilus influenzae type b* (a bacteria that causes meningitis, pneumonia, and skin and throat infections)
- **IPV and OPV** – Protects against **polio** (a virus that attacks the spinal nerves, causing paralysis)
- **Rotavirus** – Protects against **rotavirus** (a virus that causes severe diarrhea in children)
- **MMR** – Protects against **measles**, **mumps**, and **rubella** (viral infections characterized by rashes, fever, and potentially serious side effects such as heart damage, pneumonia, infertility, and birth defects when pregnant women are infected)
- **Varicella** – Protects against **chickenpox** (a viral skin disease)

IMMUNIZATION SCHEDULE:

To obtain a copy of the recommended doses and times when children should be immunized, visit any of the Web sites below. Discuss an immunization and booster schedule with your child's doctor or your local health clinic, and be sure to take your child's immunization records with you to each visit.

- **American Academy of Pediatrics:** www.aap.org/family/parents/immunize.htm
- **American Academy of Family Physicians:** www.aafp.org/afp/980101ap/special.html
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Immunization Program:** www.cdc.gov/nip/pdf/child-schedule.pdf (requires Adobe Acrobat Reader)

Additional Sources: CDC's National Immunization Program, Immunization Action Coalition, American Academy of Pediatrics, AMA's Encyclopedia of Medicine

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HOW DO VACCINES WORK?

Vaccines protect you from infectious diseases that can cause serious illness or death. They are usually given as a shot or by mouth. They contain a weakened or killed form of the disease-causing bacteria or virus to which your body builds defenses (called **antibodies**). These antibodies help the body recognize and prevent the disease from occurring if a person is exposed to the disease in the future. Having antibodies to prevent disease is called **immunity**.

ARE VACCINES SAFE?

In the vast majority of cases, there are no serious side effects from immunization. Some vaccines may cause some mild pain and swelling at the site of the injection. Some children develop a slight fever and may be sleepy or cranky. More severe reactions are rare. Most importantly, the risks of contracting a potentially serious and dangerous childhood disease are much greater than the risk of a serious reaction from an immunization.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
National Immunization Information Hotline
800/232-2522
800/232-0233 (Spanish)
or www.cdc.gov/nip
- American Academy of Pediatrics
What Parents Need to Know About Immunizations and Childhood Disease
www.aap.org
- Immunization Action Coalition
1573 Selby Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55104
or www.immunize.org

INFORM YOURSELF:

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