

A Parent's Guide to Vaccinations

Bringing a newborn home and facing the initial challenges of parenting can prove to be a stressful time for many parents. As anxiety is coupled with excitement, parents may find themselves overwhelmed with a variety of questions ranging from eating habits to diapering. The first few months of the child's life is also a time when parents must be sure the child gets the proper immunizations.

How many shots will my baby need? Why are immunizations necessary? How do immunizations work? Are they safe? These may be a few of the many questions parents ask when presented with immunization options. Before the child is 2 years old, 16 different vaccinations are recommended. These vaccinations prevent life-threatening viruses that a young child's immune system might have trouble fighting off on its own.

Vaccines are administered through an injection or oral dose and four different types are currently available. Weakened and inactivated viruses are injected in some vaccines. Other vaccines contain toxins produced by disease-causing bacteria or biosynthetic substances. After the virus's introduction into the child's body, the child's immune system produces antibodies to fight off the weakened, dead, or synthetic virus.

Vaccinations are safe, but rare extreme reactions do occur. The long-term benefits of immunizing your child far outweigh the risks of any reactions. The American Osteopathic Association supports the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in its efforts to increase immunization rates by encouraging all D.O.s to vaccinate patients of all ages when appropriate.

Some mild side effects like slight fever or tenderness around the injection may occur. These can be treated with acetaminophen or ibuprofen for pain relief. To make the procedure easier for both parent and child physicians suggests planning a fun activity after the injection so the experience is not totally unpleasant. Parents should delay an immunization if their child is sick with anything more than the common cold.

Vaccinations are important to every child and to society as a whole. For example, before the polio vaccine 13,000 to 20,000 cases were reported in the United States each year, according to the CDC. Today, this debilitating disease has been virtually eliminated in the U.S. and Western Hemisphere. In addition, before the introduction of the Hib vaccine, meningitis killed nearly 600 children in the U.S. each year. A 98 percent decrease in the incidence of this disease has occurred since the introduction of the vaccine in 1987. In these two cases alone, time has proven that vaccines work to prevent serious diseases.

What kinds of vaccinations are there?



The list of acronyms and medical names for vaccinations paired with the schedule of immunization ages can be quite confusing for many parents. For this reason, it is important that parents start a vaccination health record at birth and update it each time the child receives a vaccination. This list can help parents keep track of the vaccination names and the diseases they prevent:

- **Hep B:** This vaccine prevents hepatitis B, a virus that infects the liver. It is usually given in a series of three injections; the first given shortly after birth, then at the ages of 1-4 months and 6-18 months. It is unclear how long this vaccination will last; therefore, patients should be re-evaluated after 10 years to see if they need a booster.
- **DtaP:** This vaccine prevents diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis (whooping cough). It is administered in a series of five injections, usually beginning at the age of 2 months and then at ages

4 months, 6 months, 15-18 months, and 4-6 years.

- **Hib:** This vaccine protects against meningitis. It is administered in series of four injections; first when the child is about 2 months old and then at the ages of 4 months, 6 months, and 12-15 months.
- **IPV:** This vaccine protects against polio and is required before starting school in most states. Four injections are necessary, beginning when the child is 2 months old and then at ages 4 months, 6-18 months, and 4-6 years.
- **MMR:** This vaccine prevents measles, mumps, and rubella and is also required before starting school in most states. It is administered in two doses, the first usually around 12 to 15 months of age and the second before entering school (4-6 years old).
- **Varicella:** This vaccine protects against chicken pox. Only one injection is necessary, and it is given between the ages of 12 and 18 months.

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