

Childhood Immunization

What is immunization?

Immunization is a way to protect your child from getting a number of illnesses. Many of these illnesses are easily spread from child to child and can cause serious health problems. They can even result in death.

During their first two years of life, children should be given vaccines (medicines) to protect them from:

- Pertussis (whooping cough)
- Hepatitis B
- Rubella (measles)
- Tetanus (lockjaw)
- Mumps
- Diphtheria
- Rubella (German measles)
- Polio
- Haemophilus influenzae type B
- Chickenpox (varicella)
- Pneumococcal disease
- Rotavirus
- Hepatitis A

These vaccines are very safe and have saved thousands of children from getting sick.

When should my child get immunized?

Children should get immunized during their first two years of life. Your child may need several doses of the vaccines to be fully protected. For example, health care providers recommend that children receive their first dose of MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) vaccination at 12 months of age or older and a second dose prior to elementary school entry (around four to six years of age). Children can get the vaccines at regularly scheduled well visits.

How are the vaccines given?

Most vaccines are given as shots.

Are the vaccines safe?

Yes. Vaccines for childhood diseases are very safe. Sometimes, a vaccine will cause mild side effects like a sore arm/leg or low fever. A bad side effect is not likely to happen. Childhood diseases are a greater health risk to children than the vaccines. Ask your health care provider to tell you about risks and side effects.

When should a child not be vaccinated?

In a few cases, it's better to wait to get a vaccine. Some children who are very sick should not get a vaccine at all. Reasons that you should wait or not get a vaccine may include:

- Being sick with something more serious than a cold
- Having a bad reaction after the first dose of a vaccine
- Having a convulsion (sudden jerky body movements) that is thought to be caused by a vaccine

If my child is over two years old, can she/he still be vaccinated?

Yes. Vaccines can be given to older children and adults. Children are vaccinated early in life so that they have less chance of getting sick. The types of vaccines may be different for older children. Talk to your health care provider about how you and your child can be vaccinated.

Should I get vaccinated if I plan to get pregnant?

If a pregnant woman gets German measles (rubella), her baby can be born with birth defects. If you don't know whether you have ever had German measles or if you were vaccinated for German measles, talk to your health care provider about getting the vaccine. You should not get the vaccine if you plan to get pregnant within the next three months.

Why should I bother with vaccines?

Thanks to vaccines, childhood diseases are less common. But these diseases can still be caught, and they can be deadly. Children still suffer from choking, brain damage, paralysis (being unable to move parts the body), heart problems, blindness, and other health problems because of childhood diseases.

In most states, children must be immunized against childhood diseases before they can enter school. It is very important to keep a record of your child's immunizations. This record is an important part of his or her health history.

For more information contact Cleveland Clinic Wooster Pediatrics or Family Medicine at: 330-287-4500.

This article has been brought to you by the Cleveland Clinic partnering with the representatives of the Wayne/Holmes Emergency Coalition. If you would like to submit questions or make topic suggestions, please go to our website at www.whec.org.