LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Childhood Immunizations

Frequently Asked Questions

Are vaccines safe?

Yes. Vaccines and adjuvants (substances that are added to vaccines to help them work better) are both very safe. The United States' long-standing vaccine safety system ensures that vaccines are as safe as possible. Currently, the United States has the safest vaccine supply in its history. Millions of children safely receive vaccines each year. More information on adjuvants can be found at https://www.cdc.gov/vaccinesafety/Concerns/adjuvants.html.

What are the side effects of the vaccines?

Vaccines, like any medication, may cause some side effects. Most of these side effects are very minor, like soreness where the shot was given, fussiness, or a low-grade fever.

Serious reactions such as a severe allergic reaction or Guillain-Barré syndrome (GBS) are very rare. GBS is a disorder in which a person's own immune system damages their nerve cells, causing muscle weakness and sometimes paralysis. GBS can occur regardless of vaccination. Most people recover within weeks.

Can a vaccine give me the virus?

The antigens in most vaccines come from the germs themselves, but the germs are weakened or killed so they cannot cause illness. Live vaccines on the other hand are made of a weakened (but not killed) strain of the virus. Persons with an altered immune system, due to disease or medications, should see their pediatrician before getting live virus vaccines. Live virus vaccines include measles, mumps, rubella (MMR), varicella (VAR), and the intranasal flu vaccine (FluMist, Fluenz). The flu vaccine given by injection has a killed virus vaccine and will not give you the flu. The oral polio vaccine (OPV) is no longer recommended in the United States due to safety concerns. The polio vaccine given by injection (IPV) has a killed virus and will not give you polio.

Why are vaccines necessary? Aren't I protected from community (herd) immunity?

Vaccines can prevent infectious diseases that once killed or harmed many infants, children, and adults. Without vaccines, you are at risk for getting seriously ill and suffering pain, disability, and even death from diseases like measles and whooping cough.

Many infections can spread easily from person to person throughout the community, which can quickly make a lot of people sick. When enough people are vaccinated against a certain disease, infections can't spread as easily— and everyone is less likely to get the disease. To get protection from community (herd) immunity, nearly all of the other community members must have immunity.

Infectious Disease	Percent of population that must be vaccinated to be protected from herd immunity
Measles	94 percent
Pertussis	94 percent
Polio	93 percent
Mumps	86 percent
Diphtheria	85 percent
Rubella	85 percent

Source: Fine PEM. Herd Immunity: history, theory, practice. Epidemiol Rev 15:265-302, 1993.

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Is there a link between vaccines and autism?

No. Scientific studies and reviews continue to show no relationship between vaccines and autism.

Some people have suggested that thimerosal (a compound that contains mercury) in vaccines given to infants and young children might be a cause of autism. Others have suggested that the MMR (measles-mumps-rubella) vaccine may be linked to autism. However, numerous scientists and researchers have studied and continue to study the MMR vaccine and thimerosal, and reach the same conclusion: there is no link between MMR vaccine or thimerosal and autism.

Can vaccines overload my baby's immune system?

Vaccines do not overload the immune system. Every day, a healthy baby's immune system successfully fights off thousands of germs. Antigens are parts of germs that cause the body's immune system to go to work to build antibodies, which fight off diseases. Even if babies receive several vaccinations in one day, vaccines contain only a tiny fraction of the antigens they encounter every day in their environment and will not overload the immune system.

The timing of when vaccines are given is chosen carefully to maximize (not overwhelm) the body's response to the vaccination. For example, live vaccines can be given together, but if separated, they need to be given at least 30 days apart. Vaccines give your child the antibodies they need to fight off serious vaccine-preventable diseases.

Why are so many doses needed for each vaccine?

Getting every recommended dose of each vaccine provides your child with the best protection possible. Depending on the vaccine, your child will need more than one dose to build high enough immunity to prevent disease or to boost immunity that fades over time. Your child may also receive more than one dose to make sure they are protected if they did not get immunity from a first dose, or to protect them against germs that change over time, like flu. Every dose is important because each protects against infectious diseases that can be especially serious for infants and very young children.

Why do vaccines start so early? Can I delay vaccines?

The recommended schedule protects infants and children by providing immunity early in life, before they come into contact with life-threatening diseases. Delaying vaccines puts children at risk of developing diseases during the time you delay their shots. Children receive immunization early because they are susceptible to diseases at a young age. The consequences of these diseases can be very serious, even life-threatening, for infants and young children. Children under age 5 are especially susceptible to diseases because their immune systems have not built up the necessary defenses to fight infection.

Haven't we gotten rid of most of these diseases in this country?

Some vaccine-preventable diseases, like pertussis (whooping cough) and chickenpox, remain common in the United States. On the other hand, other diseases that vaccines prevent, such as polio, rarely occur in this country because of vaccines. However, if we stopped vaccinating, the few cases we have in the United States could very quickly become tens or hundreds of thousands of cases. Even though many serious vaccine-preventable diseases are uncommon in the United States, some are common in other parts of the world. Even if your family does not travel internationally, you could come into contact with international travelers anywhere in your community. Children who don't receive all vaccinations and are exposed to a disease can become seriously sick and spread it through a community.

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My child is sick right now. Is it okay to still get shots?

Talk with your child's doctor, but children can usually get vaccinated even if they have a mild illness like a cold, earache, mild fever, or diarrhea. If the doctor says it is okay, your child can still get vaccinated.

Don't infants have natural immunity? Isn't natural immunity better than the kind from vaccines.

Babies may get some temporary protection from mom during the last few weeks of pregnancy, but only for diseases to which mom is immune. Breastfeeding may also protect your baby temporarily, but these antibodies do not last long, leaving your baby vulnerable to disease. Natural immunity occurs when your child is exposed to a disease and becomes infected. It is true that natural immunity usually results in better immunity than vaccination, but the risks are much greater. A natural chickenpox infection may result in pneumonia, whereas the vaccine might only cause a sore arm for a couple of days.

Can't I just wait to vaccine my baby, since he/she isn't in child-care, where he/she could be exposed to disease?

No, even young children who are cared for at home can be exposed to vaccine preventable diseases, so it's important for them to get all their vaccines at the recommended ages. Children can catch these illnesses from any number of people or places, including from parents, brothers or sisters, visitors to their home, on playgrounds or even at the grocery store. Regardless of whether or not your baby is cared for outside the home, she comes in contact with people throughout the day, some of whom may be sick but not know it yet. If someone has a vaccine preventable disease, they may not have symptoms or the symptoms may be mild, and they can end up spreading disease to babies or young children. Remember, many of these diseases can be especially dangerous to young children so it is safest to vaccinate your child at the recommended ages to protect her, whether or not she is in child care.

Do I have to vaccine my baby on schedule if I'm breastfeeding?

Yes, even breastfed babies need to be protected with vaccines at the recommended ages. The immune system is not fully developed at birth, which puts newborns at greater risk for infections. Breast milk provides important protection from some infections as your baby's immune system is developing. For example, babies who are breastfed have a lower risk of ear infections, respiratory tract infections, and diarrhea. However, breast milk does not protect children against all diseases. Even in breastfed infants, vaccines are the most effective way to prevent many diseases. Your baby needs the long-term protection that can only come from making sure he receives all his vaccines according to the CDC's recommended schedule.

I got the whooping cough and flu vaccines during my pregnancy? Why does my baby need these vaccines too?

The protection you passed to your baby before birth will give him some early protection against whooping cough and flu. However, these antibodies will only give him short-term protection. It is very important for your baby to get vaccines on time so he can start building his own protection against these serious diseases. Live vaccines (such as MMR) are not given until one year of age because immunity provided by the mother keeps lives vaccines from working well before this age.

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What vaccines does my child need?

We recommended that your child receive the following vaccines:

- Diptheria-tetanus-acellular Pertussis vaccine “DTaP”
- Haemophilis influenza type B vaccine “Hib”
- Hepatitis A vaccine “HepA”
- Hepatitis B vaccines “HepB” (3 or more doses)
- Human papillomavirus vaccine “HPV”
- Inactivated poliovirus vaccine “IPV”
- Influenza vaccine “Flu”
- Measles-mumps-rubella vaccine “MMR”
- Meningococcal conjugate vaccine “MCV”
- Pneumococcal conjugate vaccine “PCV”
- Rotavirus “RV”
- Varicella vaccine “VAR”

Depending on the vaccine, your child will need more than one dose to build high enough immunity to prevent diseases or to boost immunity that fades over time.

Children with an altered immune system due to disease or medications should see their pediatrician before getting live virus vaccines (such as MMR and VAR). For more detailed information on each vaccine, refer to the manufacturuers’ product insert or visit the national immunization program website at www.cdc.gov/vaccines or call the national immunization hotline at 800-232-2522.

Where can my child get immunized?

If you qualify for free vaccines, they are available at Parish Health Units and Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC). The day of the week that immunizations are available varies by each clinic. Vaccination times are lsited below, but are subject to change. Please contact the clinic for the most updated information. Appointments are reocmmended. More information can be found at www.ldh.la.gov/healthybabies.

When should I take my child for vaccinations?

Vaccines are recommended at birth, 2 months, 4 months, 6 months, 12-15 months, 18-23 months, 4 years, 11-12 years and 16 years of age. All young children have a high risk of getting sick from infections because their bodies do not yet have protection from vaccines or memory from fighting previous infections. Vaccines should not be delayed for school entry.

We recommend adding an alert to your electronic calendar to remind you when you child’s next vaccine is due. Make a personalized vaccination schedule for your child at https://www2a.cdc.gov/nip/kidstuff/newscheduler_le/default.asp.

Do I have to pay for vaccinations?

The Vaccine for Children (VFC) program provides vaccines, free of cost, to children 18 years of age or younger that are uninsured, underinsured, have Medicaid, or are an American Indian or Alaska Native. Although the vaccines are free, the doctor may charge you for the cost of an office visit.. Visit https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/programs/vfc/index.html for more information on the VFC program. We recommend calling the clinic ahead of time to ask if they have any additional charges.

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Where can I get a copy of my immunization record?

You can get a free copy of your immunization record on MyIR at http:/la.myir.net

Why does my child need a chickenpox shot? Isn't it a mild disease?

Your child needs a chickenpox vaccine because chickenpox can actually be a serious disease. In many cases, children experience a mild case of chickenpox, but other children may have blisters that become infected. Others may develop pneumonia. There is no way to tell in advance how severe your child's symptoms will be. Before vaccine was available, about 50 children died every year from chickenpox, and about 1 in 500 children who got chickenpox was hospitalized.

Which vaccines are mandated for children in daycares or schools?

The Louisiana Office of Public Health strongly encourages age-appropriate vaccinations for children. Immunizations reduce preventable death and disability for an individual child, interrupt disease transmission in communities and decreases the number of vaccine preventable disease outbreaks in Louisiana. Although enforcement of vaccine requirements happens within the school system, vaccine recommendations apply to all children, including home study students, for protection in all social environments. The specific legislation requiring immunization for entering daycare centers or schools is found in Louisiana Revised Statue 17:170 available at
http://www.legis.la.gov/Legis/Law.aspx?d=79952

I have a concern about a vaccination. Who can I talk to about this?

All children should have a pediatrician that they see regularly, starting at birth. Pediatricians are able to answer most vaccine questions. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) is available to take your questions. You can contact them at 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636) or email them at nipinfo@cdc.gov. More information is also available online:

Diptheria-tetanus-acellular Pertussis Vaccine "DTaP"
https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/vis/vis-statements/dtap.html
https://www.cdc.gov/vaccinesafety/vaccines/dtap-tdap-vaccine.html

Haemophilus influenza type B vaccine "Hib"
https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/vis/vis-statements/hib.html
https://www.cdc.gov/vaccinesafety/vaccines/hib-vaccine.html

Hepatitis A "HepA"
https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/vis/vis-statements/hep-a.html

Hepatitis B vaccine "HepB"
https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/vis/vis-statements/hep-b.html
https://www.cdc.gov/vaccinesafety/vaccines/hepatitis-b-vaccine.html

Human papillomavirus vaccine “HPV”
https://www.cdc.gov/hpv/parents/vaccine.html
https://www.cdc.gov/hpv/parents/vaccinesafety.html

Inactivated poliovirus vaccine “IPV”
https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/vis/vis-statements/ipv.html

Influenza “Flu”
https://www.cdc.gov/flu/consumer/vaccinations.htm

Measles-mumps-rubella vaccine “MMR”
https://www.cdc.gov/vaccinesafety/vaccines/mmr-vaccine.html

Meningococcal conjugate vaccine “MCV”
https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/mening/index.html

Pneumococcal conjugate vaccine “PCV”
https://www.cdc.gov/vaccinesafety/vaccines/pneumococcal-vaccine.html

Rotavirus “RV”
https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/vis/vis-statements/rotavirus.html

Varicella Vaccine “VAR”
https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/varicella/public/index.html
https://www.cdc.gov/vaccinesafety/vaccines/varicella-vaccine.html