

Children's Health: Vaccinations

Vaccines have almost completely wiped out several serious childhood diseases such as measles, mumps, whooping cough, smallpox, polio, diphtheria and haemophilus infections.

What is a Vaccine?

Vaccines contain killed or weakened disease organisms (typically inactive bacteria or weakened viruses) that are administered to protect against serious diseases. Vaccines cause the body to produce antibodies, which are special agents of the immune system, to attack harmful elements inside the body. While fighting the disease organism, the antibodies learn to recognize it so they can attack it when the body is exposed to it later.

Vaccines are usually administered in one of two ways: orally or through an injection. Doctors have found that orally administered vaccines tend to have a higher chance of side effects or allergic reactions than injected vaccines.

Overall, vaccines are safe to administer and typically only cause minor side effects. According to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the risk of contracting a disease is much more dangerous than the risk of

a serious reaction to a vaccination.

Should I Vaccinate my Child?

Prevention is always better than treatment. Experts recommend that all children be routinely vaccinated. Vaccines are responsible for controlling many infectious diseases that at one time were very common and very deadly. Scientists, doctors and other health care professionals extensively test the vaccines to make sure they are safe and effective. In the United States, the FDA reviews all the test results and then decides whether to approve a vaccine for use.

When is it Time to Vaccinate?

Newborns are immune to many diseases because of antibodies they have acquired from their mothers while in the womb. These antibodies only last for about 1-12 months after birth, so it is best to vaccinate children when they are babies. However, it is never too late. By vaccinating your child, you will not have to worry about him or

her becoming infected or infecting others, especially once he or she reaches school age when the risk increases. If you are unsure when you should take your child in for vaccinations, call your doctor, clinic or local health department for information and vaccination schedules.

Vaccinations are covered by most insurance programs, but because of their importance they are available even to those without insurance. If you are not insured and cannot afford your child's vaccinations, contact your city, county or state health departments.



Did you know...?

Most vaccines are administered in more than one dose over a period of time, with several months between vaccinations. The DTaP (diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis) vaccine also has "boosters" for adolescents and adults, which are recommended every 10 years for continuous protection.