

Guide for Parents about Childhood Vaccines

We spoke to parents to find out what questions they have about childhood vaccines. This page gives you answers to common concerns such as:

- How do vaccines protect my child?
 - What ages should babies and children be vaccinated?
 - How do I get my child vaccinated?
 - Where can I get further information?
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Vaccines and protection

Why does my child need vaccines?

Vaccines help protect your child from diseases that used to kill or harm many babies, children and adults. For example, polio is a dangerous disease that is now rare because of the widespread use of vaccines.

What would happen if we stopped giving children vaccines?

If we stopped giving our children vaccines, dangerous diseases, such as polio, could become common again. There are some children who cannot be vaccinated for medical reasons. These children are at risk of serious diseases if other children are not vaccinated.



Vaccines protect your child, and they also protect the most vulnerable children in our community.

How do vaccines work?

Vaccines contain a small and harmless amount of the virus or bacteria that causes a disease. When your child gets a vaccine, it sets off antibodies to fight the virus or bacteria. If your child comes in contact with the virus or bacteria again, they will have these antibodies to fight it and they won't get sick.

This means that your child is now **immune** to the disease.

Are vaccines safe?

Yes, vaccines are very safe. All vaccines are fully tested before they are approved for use by the European Medicines Agency (EMA) and the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA).

Across the world, **millions of children safely receive vaccines each year**. The amount of virus or bacteria in a vaccine is harmless. There may be some side effects. The vast majority of these are minor and include redness, swelling or a slight fever. Statistically, the degree of serious reactions is low. You can read more about side effects using our further information section below.

Can the vaccine make my child unwell?

No, the vaccine will not make your child ill. There are many myths, rumours and scare stories about vaccines that are not true, especially on the



internet. If you wish to read more about vaccines, make sure that you can trust the information you are reading.

Ages when vaccines are due

Why do babies and young children get so many vaccines?

Babies and young children are vulnerable to disease and need to be protected. They can be exposed to disease from family members and other close contacts. Some of these diseases can be life-threatening. For instance, meningitis can cause life-threatening blood poisoning (septicaemia) and result in permanent damage to the brain or nerves.

Babies and young children get different vaccines at certain times. These times are set out in a vaccine schedule (a calendar). This schedule is designed to protect babies and young children so that they get protection from serious diseases **before** they come into contact with serious diseases. (This schedule is also called the immunisation schedule.)

Some vaccines are repeated throughout the schedule to make sure your child is fully protected. By vaccinating your child according to the schedule, your child will be protected when they need it the most. Have a look at the current vaccine schedule for children in Ireland in the table below. For example, you can see that at 2 months your child will get 3 vaccines and these will be given by mouth (orally). Different vaccines protect against different diseases.



Should I delay or skip some vaccines for my child?

No, there is no good reason to delay or skip any vaccine. If you delay or skip vaccines for your child, they will not be protected when they need it most.

We know that some people worry about giving their child multiple vaccines at the same time, but medical experts have confirmed that it is safe to receive multiple vaccines at the same time.

Are there any alternatives to vaccines?

No. Only vaccines can protect your child against the viruses and bacteria that cause vaccine-preventable diseases. Some people think that if you allow a child to get the disease, they will develop 'natural immunity' and that this will 'boost their immune system'. However, remember that these diseases are life-threatening. Without a vaccine, your child could become seriously ill or even die if they catch one of these diseases.

Getting vaccinated

Where are free vaccines given to children in Ireland?

Childhood vaccines are provided for free in:

- Doctor's surgeries,
- Hospitals,
- Health clinics, and
- Schools.



Where you get your child vaccinated depends on the age of your child and your local circumstances and services. Your child will go to visit their doctor for a vaccine three times in their first six months.

How can I prepare my child for their vaccines?

Below are some tips to help you prepare your child **before** each vaccination visit:

- Be calm and reassuring when talking about the vaccine visit.
- Explain that vaccines 'make sure you don't get sick' and 'help to keep you healthy.' They just put something in our body to keep you healthy.
- Explain that the injections might 'pinch' or 'poke', but that it will be over very quickly. Avoid words that may scare your child such as 'pain', 'shot', or 'jab'.
- Help your child understand that vaccines are a positive part of healthcare. Don't tell scary stories or making threats about using 'shots' and 'needles' as punishment for being bold.

To support your child **during** the vaccine visit, try these tips:

- Reassure your child by holding them on your lap. Smile and make eye contact with your child.
- Remind your child that vaccines 'make sure you don't get sick' and 'help to keep you healthy.'
- Distract babies and young children by cuddling, singing or talking softly.
- Bring your child's favourite toy or blanket to comfort them.



- Distract older children by telling them a story or pointing out interesting things in the room.
- Comfort your child if they cry or feel anxious. Do not give out to them for not 'being brave'.

Further information

Read the HSE booklet ['Your child's immunisation: A guide for parents.'](#)

Read answers to questions about the [HSE childhood immunisation schedule.](#)

Read about [vaccine ingredients.](#) Remember: all vaccines are fully tested before they are approved for use.

A guide to common terms

Immunity means protection against an infectious disease. This means that you will not catch a disease if you come in contact with it.

Immunization means the process that helps your body to become immune to certain diseases. Immunity is provided by vaccinations.

Vaccine means a preparation that stimulates the body's immune system to make protective substances against a particular disease.

Vaccination means inserting a vaccine into the body (usually with a needle).

A **vaccine schedule** sets out the correct time to give children various vaccines. The layout of this schedule ensures that children receive protection when they need it. This is also called the immunization schedule.

Infectious diseases are vaccine-preventable diseases, caused by viruses and bacteria but can be prevented by getting vaccines. These preventable diseases through vaccination have existed for thousands of years. Many children and adults have died or become seriously ill as a result of these diseases in the past before vaccines became available.