

Immunisation is important for children

What is immunisation?

Immunisation is a simple and effective way of protecting children from serious diseases. It not only helps protect individuals, it also protects the broader community by minimising the spread of disease.

Vaccines work by triggering the immune system to fight against certain diseases. If a vaccinated person comes in contact with these diseases, their immune system is able to respond more effectively, preventing the disease from developing or greatly reducing its severity.

What childhood diseases does immunisation protect against?

Immunisation protects against many serious childhood diseases, including:

- whooping cough (pertussis)
- measles
- German measles (rubella)
- meningococcal C
- pneumococcal disease
- chickenpox (varicella)
- tetanus
- mumps
- polio
- diphtheria
- rotavirus
- hepatitis.

These diseases can cause hospitalisation, serious ongoing health conditions (including cancer, brain damage and deafness) and are sometimes fatal. High immunisation rates in the community have led to many of these diseases becoming rare. However, they still exist and the risks of side-effects or complications from these diseases are far greater than the very small risks of side effects from vaccination.

What vaccinations should my child have and when?

The National Immunisation Program Schedule recommends certain vaccinations at certain times. These vaccines are available free of charge for all Australian children. Childhood immunisations are recommended at birth, two months (can be given at six weeks), four months, six months, 12 months, 18 months and four years (can be given at 3 years 6 months).

You can obtain the latest schedule information by talking to your immunisation provider, calling 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84) or visiting www.qld.gov.au/health/conditions/immunisation/index.html.

Some children (eg. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children or children with medical risk factors) may require additional vaccines. If you are unsure, check with your doctor or immunisation provider.

Students in Year 8 and Year 10 are also offered recommended vaccines through a school-based program.

Don't delay!

To offer the best protection, it is important for your child to be vaccinated at the recommended times rather than delaying or splitting vaccines.

Unborn babies are protected by their mother's antibodies, which last for a few months after birth. Once these antibodies wear off, babies are at risk of serious infections and diseases. Babies are due for their first vaccinations before these antibodies disappear.¹ Vaccines are recommended for babies because their immune systems are not yet fully mature, making it easier for bacteria and viruses to multiply.

Is vaccination safe?

Over 90% of Queensland children aged between 24 to 27 months are fully immunised.³ Maintaining this high rate helps protect everyone.

Vaccination is a very safe prevention tool. However, no medication can ever be 100% safe. The benefits of vaccination far outweigh the risks of becoming ill with a life-threatening disease.

All vaccines used in Australia undergo extensive research and must be approved for use by the Therapeutic Goods Administration. Before a vaccine can be licensed, it is tested over several years to ensure it is safe and that it works.

Any concerns about vaccine safety should be raised with your doctor or immunisation provider.

Can my child be vaccinated if they are ill on the day?

Your child should not be vaccinated if they have a fever over 38.5⁰C on the day of vaccination. Valid medical reasons not to vaccinate children are rare, but if you are unsure, seek medical advice. Check with your doctor if your child has ever had an allergic reaction, or is undergoing a treatment such as chemotherapy which suppresses the immune system.

Do vaccines have side-effects?

Like all medications, vaccines may have side effects. Nearly all of these are minor reactions, such as soreness at the injection site or a mild fever. Most side-effects are short lived and do not lead to any long term problems. A slight reaction actually shows that the vaccine is having the desired effect on the immune system. More serious side effects are extremely rare, but may include allergic reactions (including anaphylaxis). About 1 in 17,000 babies may develop intussusception in the first few weeks after the 1st and 2nd vaccine doses following rotavirus vaccination.

If you are at all concerned, seek medical advice immediately.

Where can I have my child vaccinated?

Check with your local council and/or child health centre to see if they offer free vaccination clinics (often no appointment is necessary).

You can also have your child vaccinated by your doctor. While the vaccine will be free, your doctor may charge a consultation fee.

Keeping a record of vaccinations

It is important to keep a record of your child's vaccinations. Make sure you take your child's Personal Health Record to each vaccination so the service provider can record the details for you.

Your child's vaccination information will also be sent to Queensland Health and the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register. This information is protected by strict privacy laws and is used to allocate your Centrelink payments including the Childcare Benefit and Maternity Immunisation Allowance.

Proof of vaccination is often needed to enrol your child in childcare or school. You can contact the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register on 1800 653 809 for a free copy of your child's immunisation history up to 7 years of age.

To find out more about immunisation:

- visit www.qld.gov.au/health/conditions/immunisation/index.html
- talk to your doctor or immunisation provider
- call 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84)

Translation service

Telephone interpreter service: 131450

References

1. Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, 2010. 'Frequently Asked Questions About Immunisation', Available at www.health.qld.gov.au/internet/immunise/publishing.nsf/content/faq
2. Every Child by Two, 2009. 'Importance of Timing', Available at www.vaccinateyourbaby.org/about/importance.cfm
3. Australian Childhood Immunisation Register, September 2010.