

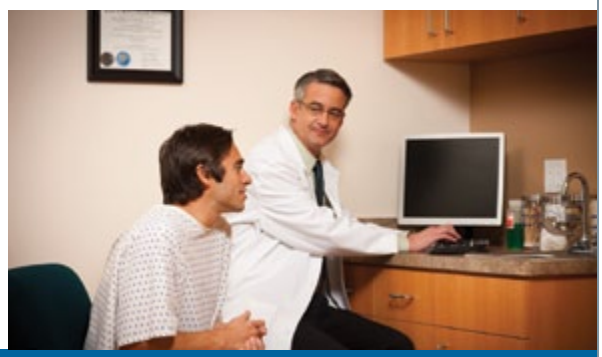

Immunizations

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Unfounded Vaccine Fears Put Everyone at Risk

Parents who fail to get their children immunized because of false information put many at risk.

Most people view vaccines as a life-saving scientific breakthrough. But others mistakenly fear them like the plague itself.

You don't have to go much farther than the Internet to find sites, organizations and movie stars - an anti-vaccine movement - devoted to warning the public about alleged dangers of vaccines.

No autism-vaccine link

At the movement's core is the fear that toxins in childhood immunizations are the cause of autism and possibly other diseases. This group claims that the rise of autism is due to the number of vaccines children get at a young age. While it is true that autism is typically noted around the time many childhood immunizations are given, decades of scientific research have not found a link between vaccines and autism.

That's not to say that all vaccines are 100 percent safe. There are risks with vaccinations, although the most common risks, a sore arm or mild fever, are temporary. More serious reactions are extremely rare. Many people think they are avoiding risk by choosing against vaccination. Sadly, this is not true.

Video Spotlight:

The Truth About Childhood Immunizations and Risk

UnitedHealthcare®

Failing to immunize not only puts your child at risk of getting a deadly disease but also of spreading that disease to the rest of your family and others. Polio, measles, diphtheria, chickenpox and other dangerous diseases have been kept in check with vaccines, but not completely wiped out. Many younger parents, those who were not old enough to witness first-hand the devastating effects of these diseases, may not fully appreciate their terrible force.

Deadly diseases waiting for comeback

As more people opt out of immunization, the chance of these killers staging a comeback increases. This is a frightening outlook. In fact, pertussis, or whooping cough, a disease that was all but eliminated, (1,000 cases in 1976) has been slowly coming back (26,000 in 2004). Whooping cough causes high fever and can be fatal in babies.

Measles is also well-positioned for a comeback. The number of reported cases (while still relatively rare) has risen steadily from year to year. With measles, one cough can spread the disease to virtually any susceptible person in the room. Because the disease is so highly contagious, people who are vaccinated serve as a barrier to a widespread outbreak. But rising numbers of unvaccinated people provide a reservoir of potential disease. In other words, vaccines work only if a critical percentage of the population takes them.

Most parents are just trying to make the right decision for their children. When they look to the Internet, they can find a wealth of inaccurate information. The information plays to their fears and takes advantage of a lack of understanding about the complex topic of vaccines.

Protecting your family and the community

Many believe that the vaccine decision is one that will only affect their own family. But they do not think that skipping these shots could cause suffering and even death to others. Most parents are unaware their sick child could pass the disease on to a vulnerable population. For example, babies who are too young to be vaccinated may not have any protection against these diseases. Likewise, people with certain diseases like leukemia and AIDS cannot safely get some vaccinations. And in a small number of cases, vaccinations do not "take," leaving you open to catching the disease.

In the end, the decision to have children vaccinated remains with parents. If you are worried about vaccines, talk to your family doctor and find credible information to help in your decision.

Decision Focus: Vaccinations for Flu Season

Confused about which vaccinations to get this fall? We'll tell you how to help keep your family safe this flu season.

Flu shots. Some years you've been strict about getting the whole family in for a seasonal flu shot. Other years ... maybe not so much.

This year is no time to let vaccines slide down your priority list. The swine (H1N1) flu and seasonal flu are still real threats. Planning your family's vaccinations, including ones for grandma and grandpa, may be one of the most important tasks you do all year. Experts advise that you get the flu shot as soon as it becomes available in the early fall.

Is the swine flu shot different from the seasonal flu shot?

No. This year, one vaccine will protect you from both the swine and seasonal varieties of flu.

Who should get the flu vaccination?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that everyone 6 months of age and older get the flu shot this year.

Some kids may need two doses of the vaccine for it to work. Children between the ages of 6 months and 8

years need two doses of the flu shot (given about one month apart) if:

- They've never had a flu shot before
- Last year was the first year they got the flu shot and they only received one dose
- They did not get the swine flu vaccine last year (during the 2009-2010 flu season) or it's unknown if they received the swine flu shot last year

A higher-dose vaccine is available as an alternative to the flu shot for seniors older than age 65. Talk to your doctor to learn more about this option.

Reasons to get the flu vaccine

- They protect you and your family from two types of flu. Every year, 5 percent to 20 percent of the population gets the flu. That's one in 20 to one in five people, depending on the year.
- Being protected can protect you and your family from serious problems caused by the flu. More than 200,000 people a year are hospitalized from flu-related complications.
- Being protected will give you peace of mind. How forcefully the swine flu will return is unknown.

Almost everyone can get the seasonal flu vaccine. Avoiding the seasonal flu may mean that you'll be in overall better health and be able to fend off disease through the flu season.

Reasons not to get vaccinated

People who have a severe allergy to chicken eggs or had a severe reaction in the past should check with their doctors to see if they should get the shots.

Personal beliefs

- Some people want to take every precaution to prevent illness.
- Some may have religious beliefs that conflict with getting vaccinations.
- Others are concerned about vaccine safety. Vaccines, like any medication, can cause side effects. Rarely, those can be serious. For most people, though, benefits outweigh the risks of these vaccines.

Before you make a decision based on this concern, weigh the risks and benefits with your doctor. Not getting immunized puts you at risk of getting a disease that could, in rare cases, be fatal. It also raises the risk that you can spread the virus to others who may be at high risk for complications.

Another vaccination to consider

People are at increased risk of getting pneumonia when they get the flu or are otherwise sick. One type of pneumonia can be prevented with a vaccine. The CDC recommends the following people get the appropriate pneumococcal vaccine:

- All children under 5 years of age
- People age 65 or older
- People who have problems with their lungs, heart, liver, or kidneys, and people with diabetes, asthma, a lowered immune system and other chronic diseases
- People who smoke

Immunizations for Adults

Information about immunizations, including the latest recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Making sure you get all the recommended vaccines is one of the most important ways to ensure your good health. Vaccines, also called immunizations, protect you from a host of diseases, including many that are deadly.

Every year the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other expert panels release new recommendations for adult immunization schedules. The schedules change each year based on developments in vaccine research, disease outbreaks and other information.

With so many vaccines and yearly changes, it can get confusing. That's why it's important to work in partnership with your family doctor. Your doctor can help keep your immunizations up to date and keep copies of your immunization records.

Immunizations

Here is the most recent information from the CDC.

Types of vaccines

Here is information about different types of vaccines you should get:

Tetanus, diphtheria (Td) or tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis (Tdap)

Adults should get booster shots to protect against:

- **Tetanus**. A potentially deadly illness that causes painful tightening of the muscles and locking of the jaw.
- **Diphtheria**. An infection of the throat that can lead to breathing problems, paralysis, heart failure and death.
- **Pertussis**. Also called whooping cough, this disease causes the buildup of sticky, thick mucus in the windpipe. Whooping cough can lead to pneumonia and seizures.

Influenza vaccine (shot) or influenza vaccine (nasal spray)

Certain adults should get a flu shot or inhaled vaccine each fall to protect against:

- **Influenza (flu)**. Influenza (flu) is a viral illness seen in the winter that causes fever, cough and muscle aches. It can lead to pneumonia, and kills tens of thousands of people every year.

Pneumococcal

Certain adults should get this vaccine to protect against:

- **Pneumococcal infections**. The pneumococcal bacteria can cause serious infections of the lungs (pneumonia), the fluid surrounding the brain and spinal cord (meningitis) and the blood (sepsis).

Measles, mumps and rubella

Generally, anyone 18 years of age or older who was born after 1956 should get this vaccine to protect against:

- **Measles**. A highly contagious disease that can lead to pneumonia, seizures, brain damage and death.
- **Mumps**. A viral infection characterized by swelling of the salivary glands near the neck. It can lead to deafness, meningitis, painful swelling of the testicles or ovaries and, rarely, death.
- **Rubella**. Also known as German measles, rubella is a viral illness that causes a rash, mild fever and arthritis (mostly in women). It can cause birth defects or miscarriage if a woman is infected during the first three months of her pregnancy.

Some adults, including pregnant women and people with certain medical conditions, should not get this vaccine. Ask your doctor for details.

Chickenpox

Adults who have not had chickenpox or the chickenpox vaccine should get this vaccine to protect against:

- **Chickenpox**. Chickenpox (varicella) is a common childhood disease. It is usually mild, but it can be serious, especially in young infants, teens, pregnant women and adults. Chickenpox causes a rash that turns into blisters with itching. Other common symptoms include fever and fatigue. It can lead to severe skin infection, scars, pneumonia, brain damage or death.

Some adults, including pregnant women and people with certain medical conditions, should not get this vaccine. Ask your doctor for details.

Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B

Some adults should get a series of shots to protect against:

- **Hepatitis A**. A viral disease that attacks the liver, causing flu-like symptoms, jaundice, nausea and stomach pains
- **Hepatitis B**. A viral disease that can cause acute short-term symptoms, such as loss of appetite, diarrhea and vomiting, jaundice, pain in muscles, joints and stomach, and fatigue. It can also lead to liver failure and liver cancer.

Meningococcal

Some adults should get this vaccine to protect against:

- **Meningococcal infections**. The meningococcal bacteria can cause a serious infection of the fluid surrounding the brain and spinal cord (meningitis) and blood (sepsis).

Shingles (herpes zoster)

Some adults should get this vaccine to protect against:

- **Shingles**. This condition is caused by the herpes zoster virus, the same virus that causes chickenpox. After you've had chickenpox, the virus lies dormant (inactive) in your nerves. Later, often after decades, the virus may reactivate in the form of shingles.

Human papillomavirus

Some women should get a series of shots to protect against:

- **Human papillomavirus, or HPV**. The HPV vaccine offers protection from the viruses that cause most cases of genital warts and cervical cancers.

Immunization schedule

Click here to view the CDC chart detailing the adult immunization schedule.

Suggested Immunizations for Children

This article gives parents all the information they need about immunizations, including the latest recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Making sure your child gets all the recommended vaccines is one of the most important ways to ensure your child's good health. Vaccines are also called immunizations. They protect children from a host of diseases, including many that are deadly.

Every year the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other expert panels release new recommendations for childhood immunization schedules. The schedules change based on developments in vaccine research, disease outbreaks and other information.

With so many vaccines and yearly changes, it can be confusing for parents. That's why it's important to build a partnership with your pediatrician or family doctor. Your doctor can help keep your children up to date and keep copies of required immunization records.

Here is the most recent information from the CDC.

Types of vaccines

Here is information about different vaccines that children should receive:

Chickenpox

Children should receive a series of shots to protect against:

- **Chickenpox**. Chickenpox (varicella) is a common childhood disease. It is usually mild, but it can be serious, especially in young infants, teens, pregnant women and adults. Chickenpox causes a rash that turns into blisters with itching. Other common symptoms include fever and fatigue. It can lead to severe skin infection, scars, pneumonia, brain damage or death.

Diphtheria, tetanus, and acellular pertussis (DTaP)

Children should receive a series of these shots to protect against:

- **Diphtheria**. An infection of the throat that can lead to breathing problems, paralysis, heart failure and death.
- **Tetanus**. A potentially deadly illness that causes painful tightening of the muscles and locking of the jaw.
- **Pertussis**. Also called whooping cough, this disease causes the buildup of sticky, thick mucus in the windpipe. Whooping cough can lead to pneumonia and seizures.

Tetanus and diphtheria toxoid and acellular pertussis vaccine (Tdap)

Tetanus and diphtheria toxoid and pertussis vaccine is given as a booster for the diseases of diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis that were mentioned above.

Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B

Children should receive a series of shots to protect against:

- **Hepatitis A**. A viral disease that attacks the liver, causing flu-like symptoms, jaundice, nausea and stomach pains

- **Hepatitis B**. A viral disease that can cause acute short-term symptoms, such as loss of appetite, diarrhea and vomiting, jaundice, pain in muscles, joints and stomach, and fatigue. It can also lead to liver failure and liver cancer.

Haemophilus influenzae (Hib)

Children should receive a series of shots to protect against:

- **Haemophilus influenzae (Hib)**. This is a bacterial infection that can affect the brain, bloodstream, bones, joints, lungs and windpipe. Before the vaccine was developed, Hib was the most common cause of meningitis, a serious infection of the brain.

Measles, mumps and rubella

Children should receive a series of shots to protect against:

- **Measles**. This is a highly contagious disease that can lead to pneumonia, seizures, brain damage and death.
- **Mumps**. A viral infection characterized by swelling of the salivary glands near the neck. It can lead to deafness, meningitis, painful swelling of the testicles or ovaries and, rarely, death.
- **Rubella**. Also known as German measles, rubella is a viral illness that causes a rash, mild fever and arthritis (mostly in women). It can cause birth defects or miscarriage if a woman is infected during the first three months of her pregnancy.

Meningococcal

Children should receive a series of shots to protect against:

- **Meningococcal infections**. These bacteria can cause a serious infection of the fluid surrounding the brain and spinal cord (meningitis) and blood (sepsis).

Pneumococcal

Children should receive a series of shots to protect against:

- **Pneumococcal infections**. The pneumoccoccal bacteria can cause serious infections of the lungs (pneumonia), the fluid surrounding the brain and spinal cord (meningitis) and the blood (sepsis). The bacteria also cause ear infections.

Polio

Children should receive a series of vaccines to protect against:

- **Polio**. Polio is a viral disease that attacks the brain, spinal cord and central nervous system, causing paralysis and death.

Influenza vaccine (shot) or influenza vaccine (nasal spray)

Children should receive a flu shot or inhaled vaccine each fall to protect against:

- **Influenza (flu)**. Influenza (flu) is a viral illness seen in the winter that causes fever, cough and muscle aches. It can lead to pneumonia, and kills tens of thousands of people every year.

Human papillomavirus

Girls should receive a series of shots to protect against:

- **Human papillomavirus, or HPV**. The HPV vaccine offers protection from the viruses that cause genital warts and most cervical cancers.

Rotavirus

Children should receive a series of shots to protect against:

- **Rotavirus**. The rotavirus causes vomiting and watery diarrhea with fever and belly pain. Infection with the virus can lead to dangerous dehydration in children. Keep in mind that your baby can still get diarrhea from other germs. The rotavirus, though, commonly causes the most severe kind of stomach flu in babies.

Note: In the late 1990s a different type of rotavirus vaccine was used. This vaccine was found to be linked with an uncommon type of bowel obstruction called intussusception, and it was taken off the market. The new rotavirus vaccines have not been linked to intussusception.

Immunization schedules

Here are CDC charts detailing immunization schedules:

Click here to view the Recommended Immunization Schedule Ages newborn to 6 years

Click here to view the Recommended Immunization Schedule Ages 7 through 18 years

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