



Childhood Immunisations Part 1: An introduction to childhood immunisations

This Parent Tip provides some basic information on the childhood immunisation programme, explaining how vaccines work, how they are regulated and why it is important to ensure your baby receives all the recommended immunisations. We have an additional Parent Tip on getting your baby immunised and what to expect, including information on things such as soothing your baby during and after vaccinations, and what to do if they are poorly on the day of their appointment.

Just to reassure you that despite the current COVID-19 pandemic, it is still recommended that your child receives their vaccines as this protects them against other serious diseases that can still cause them harm.

How do vaccines work?

- Most vaccines contain the germ or part of the germ that causes an illness. The vaccine stimulates the immune system to make antibodies, which help the body to fight disease, and also produces 'memory cells'.
- If your child comes into contact with the infection, the immune system remembers – thanks to those memory cells - and quickly produces the right antibodies your child needs to fight it off.

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For additional Parent Tips see www.ihv.org.uk

The information in this resource was updated on 29/04/2020 and will be reviewed again in 04/2022 and when new evidence becomes available.

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How do we know vaccines are safe?

- Before any vaccine is introduced it is thoroughly tested for safety.
- The safety of all vaccines is continually monitored after they have been introduced.
- The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) (<http://bit.ly/1nPqpJv>) monitors the safety of vaccines through the Yellow Card Scheme. Parents can inform the scheme if they think a vaccine has caused a serious side effect in their child. It's important to bear in mind that nothing is totally free of side effects; even drinking too much water can be dangerous. Most side effects associated with vaccines are mild and last for only a short time and these need to be balanced against the risk of harm from the diseases that vaccines protect against.

Why does my baby need all these vaccines when you don't hear about the diseases anymore?

- Such diseases have gone away because of high vaccine levels.
- In countries where fewer people are vaccinated, diseases still occur.
- There are examples of a fall in vaccine uptake rates being followed by an increase in disease.
- As long as diseases occur in other countries, there is a risk that they may be imported to the UK and unimmunised children will be at risk.

Is there any reason not to immunise my baby?

- Very few babies cannot be immunised.
- A vaccine should not be given when a baby has had a confirmed anaphylactic reaction (very severe allergic reaction) to a previous dose of the same vaccine or to an ingredient of the vaccine (e.g. the small quantities of antibiotics that are present in some vaccines).

- If your baby has a condition which means their immune system does not work properly, they may not be able to have some live vaccines. Your healthcare team should discuss this carefully with you and advise other options to ensure your baby is protected against disease.
- In the past, babies with an egg allergy were not given MMR vaccine. However, it is now recommended that even when a child has a very severe reaction to eggs, they can be given MMR safely.

Will all these vaccines overload my baby's immune system?

- It may seem as though giving your baby an injection, which contains many vaccines all at once, is a lot for them to cope with, but remember that babies have an ability, right from birth, to cope with lots of different germs. The body is constantly surrounded by germs and has to react to them in different ways.
- Research has found that babies who are given combination vaccines do not suffer more in the way of serious infections. This is something that might happen if the vaccine was overloading their immune system.
- Combination vaccines, for example the 6-in-1 (DTP/IPV/Hib/HepB), have been developed so that babies do not have to have lots of separate injections.

Additional Reading:

The following web pages give further helpful advice on all aspects of immunising your baby:

NHS UK: bit.ly/1LLwSna

Vaccine Knowledge Project: bit.ly/2Rk6hrG

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