



Just the Facts... Back to School Basics: Immunizations

In all the back-to-school preparation and excitement, many parents may forget to do one thing that is vital to children's health: stay current on vaccinations. If children's vaccinations are not kept up to date, it could affect the health of the child.

"When it comes to child health, prevention is always better than treatment. And nowhere is this more evident than with immunizations," said Dr. Carden Johnston, 2003-2004 President of American Academy of Pediatrics.

Ideally, immunizations should begin at birth, with the child completing the primary series by age two — but the process doesn't stop there. Vaccinations are a life-long step to take for optimal health. Immunizations are one of the most important tools to protect children and adults from many infectious diseases.

Some people choose not to get vaccinations because they worry about the safety and side effects of the vaccines. Although vaccines can produce some minor side effects, they are extremely safe. Before the FDA gives approval for a vaccine to be administered to the public, it goes through years of research and testing. Then, after FDA approval, vaccines are continually monitored for their safety and effectiveness and are always held to the highest standards possible.

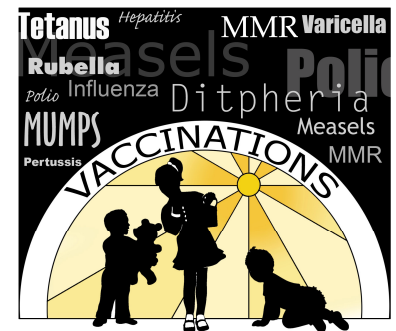
Vaccine side effects are typically a low fever or a sore injection site. These symptoms can be treated with a mild pain reliever (acetaminophen or ibuprofen). A warm, damp cloth or a heating pad can help reduce soreness. Moving or using the limb that has received the injection can also help to reduce soreness at the injection site. Despite possible side effects, in general, it is a lot safer to immunize children than to allow them to get any of the infections that vaccines prevent.

Other guidance about vaccines and immunizations includes:

- Check with the health care provider for the current vaccine schedule. Because researchers are always working to make vaccines better, the schedule could change with vaccine improvements.

- The health care provider will know which vaccines the child may be missing or will need soon and will provide that information to the parent during checkups or sick visits. Schools and daycare facilities also furnish information to parents of immunization requirements.
- Keep all the shots a child receives and dates received documented in a shot record.
- Keep track of any reactions a child has had to previous shots.
- Follow all instructions from the health care provider after a shot is given.

Before certain vaccinations are given, a Vaccine Information Statements (VIS) will be provided to the parent. These are information sheets produced by the



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that explain the benefits and risks of the vaccine. The National Childhood Vaccine Injury Act of 1986 requires that all providers of vaccines give VIS's out each time the vaccine is given.

Immunization is one of the best means of protecting a child against contagious diseases. The fact that residents of the United States and some other countries don't see diseases, such as polio and diphtheria, does not mean they no longer exist — it simply means that vaccines are working. However, they will only continue to work as long as children continue to be immunized.

The viruses and bacteria that cause vaccine-preventable disease and death still exist and can be passed on to people who are not protected by vaccines.

For more information on vaccines and vaccination requirements, visit the CDC's [National Immunization Program](#) (NIP) web page or call the CDC National Immunization Information Hotline at 1-800-232-2522 (English) or 1-800-232-0233 (Spanish).