

# Childhood immunizations

Family Health Center

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Part of your role as a parent is to protect your children from harm. One of the easiest ways to do that is to make sure their *vaccinations* (immunizations) are up to date. Vaccines help the body produce antibodies, which protect against infection. They not only help keep your own child healthy, they help all children by preventing the spread of serious childhood disease. You might not think that these diseases are a serious threat today because you don't see or hear much about them but they are still around and can be deadly.

Vaccines generally cause only minor temporary side effects, such as soreness where the shot was given or a slight fever. Serious reactions are very rare. Remember, if your child gets exposed to one of these dangerous childhood diseases, the risks of the disease are far greater than the risks of a vaccine reaction. You can even give vaccines when your child has a mild illness such as a cold, a slight fever, or is taking antibiotics. Talk to your doctor, or go to [familydoctor.org](http://familydoctor.org) if you have a concern or question.

## Types of immunizations

The **hepatitis B virus** (HBV) can cause serious liver disease and is known to be spread by contact with blood or other body fluids of an infected person. Unfortunately, about one third of infected people have no known risks or exposures. HBV can enter the blood stream, attack the liver, and cause severe illness, cancer - even death. It is given as a series of 3 shots.

**Diphtheria** causes a thick covering in the back of the throat which can lead to breathing problems, paralysis, heart failure, and death.

**Tetanus** or "lockjaw" is caused by bacteria that enter through a skin break. Tetanus causes painful muscle contractions, especially in the jaw and stomach. About 40 percent of people who get tetanus will die.

**Pertussis**, also called whooping cough, causes coughing spells so bad it is hard for infants to eat, drink, or breathe and can last for weeks. It is most dangerous for infants under 6 months and can lead to pneumonia, seizures, brain damage and death. Usually the above 3 vaccines are given together (DTaP).

Before widespread **Haemophilus influenzae type b** (Hib) vaccination, Hib disease was the leading cause of bacterial meningitis among children under 5 years old in the US and killed 1000 children yearly. Meningitis is an infection of the brain and spinal cord which can lead to lasting brain damage and deafness. Hib can also cause pneumonia and severe sore throat.

**Polio** (IPV) can paralyze a person's arms, legs, and breathing muscles leading to lifetime disability or death. It is primarily found in other parts of the world, but can be brought to the US by infected persons.

**Pneumococcal** disease causes many health problems in children including meningitis, blood infections, and middle ear infections. The bacteria are spread from person to person. Pneumococcal infection can be hard to treat because it has become resistant to some antibiotics making prevention very important.

**RotaTeq** helps protect against the **rotavirus**, a common cause of infant fever, vomiting and diarrhea.

**Measles** is a virus which can cause high fever, rash, cough, pneumonia, and encephalitis (inflammation of the brain), hearing loss and mental retardation.

**Mumps** causes fever, headache, and swollen painful glands under the jaw. Less commonly it can also lead to hearing loss, swelling of the testicles (making them unable to have children), and meningitis.

**Rubella** is also called German measles. It is usually a mild disease but potentially serious in women who become pregnant. It can cause infant blindness, deafness, and miscarriage.

Measles, mumps and rubella are usually given together (MMR). Some people have suggested that the MMR vaccine causes autism. However, extensive research has shown that there is no link between autism and childhood vaccinations.

The **Varivax** vaccine helps prevent **chickenpox**. Generally considered to be a mild disease, it can cause severe disease in some previously healthy children and adults including skin infections, scars, pneumonia, and brain damage.

**Hepatitis A** is a serious liver disease which can cause flu like illness, jaundice (yellow skin), diarrhea, and severe stomach pains. Idaho has twice the national average of hepatitis A. It is usually transmitted in contaminated food and water.

**Gardasil** helps protect against genital warts and cervical cancer caused by 4 high risk strains of **human papilloma virus** (HPV). It can be given as 3 injections over 6 months to girls 9 and over.

Meningococcal vaccine (MCV4) helps protect against the uncommon but serious form of bacterial meningitis caused by the **meningococcus** bacteria. 10-15% of these people die and 15-20% of the survivors have severe complications despite antibiotics.

**Influenza** vaccine (flu shot) is recommended for those most likely to have complications from the flu including toddlers and preschool age children 6-59 months. It is given yearly in the fall and early winter.