



## FAQ Sheet - Common questions and answers about childhood immunisation

This information has been taken from the following NHS leaflet [A guide to immunisation for babies up to 13 months of age](#) - last updated 17 April 2023.

### What is immunisation?

Immunisation is a way of protecting against serious infectious diseases. Once we have been immunised, our bodies are better able to fight those diseases if we come into contact with them.

### How do vaccines work?

Vaccines contain a small part of the bacterium or virus that causes a disease, or tiny amounts of the chemicals that the bacterium produces. Vaccines work by causing the body's immune system to make antibodies (substances that fight off infection and disease). If your child comes into contact with the infection, the antibodies will recognise it and be ready to protect him or her. Because vaccines have been used so successfully in the UK, diseases such as diphtheria have almost disappeared from this country.

There are some diseases that can kill children or cause lasting damage to their health. Immunisations are given to prepare your child's immune system to fight off those diseases if they come into contact with them.

### When should my baby be immunised?

It is important that your baby has their immunisations at the right age – the first ones are given at eight weeks old. They will be given further doses of these immunisations when they are twelve weeks old and sixteen weeks old. Other immunisations are given at one year of age. Other immunisations are given later, see the table below.

### Quick guide to the UK Childhood Immunisation Schedule

8 WEEKS	12 WEEKS	16 WEEKS	1 YEAR	2-10 YEARS	3 YEARS & 4 MONTHS
6-in-1 vaccine Rotavirus vaccine MenB	6-in-1 vaccine (2nd dose) Pneumococcal (PCV) vaccine Rotavirus vaccine (2nd dose)	6-in-1 vaccine (3rd dose) MenB (2nd dose)	Hib/MenC MMR Pneumococcal (PCV) vaccine (2nd dose) MenB (3rd dose)	Flu vaccine (every year)	MMR (2nd dose) 4-in-1 pre-school booster

### Why are babies vaccinated so early?

Many of these diseases can be particularly serious in young babies. It is important to make sure babies are protected as early as possible to prevent them catching the diseases.

### Why does my baby need more than one dose of vaccine?

Most immunisations have to be given more than once to prepare your child's immunity. Booster doses are then given later in life to provide longer-term protection.

## How will I know when my baby's immunisations are due?

Your GP practice or clinic will send you an appointment for you to bring your baby for their immunisations. Most surgeries and health centres run special immunisation or baby clinics. If you can't get to the clinic, contact the surgery to make another appointment. All childhood immunisations are free.

## What happens at the appointment?

The doctor or nurse will explain the immunisation process to you, and answer any questions you have. Most vaccines are injected into the muscle of the child's thigh or the upper arm. Rotavirus vaccine is given as drops by mouth.

## What if I miss the appointment?

If you miss the appointment or need to delay the immunisation, make a new appointment. You can pick up the immunisation schedule where it stopped without having to start again. Rotavirus vaccine can only be started in babies up to 15 weeks of age and no dose of the vaccine can be given over 24 weeks of age.

Remember, it's never too late to have your child immunised. Even if your child has missed an immunisation and is older than the recommended ages, talk to your doctor, practice nurse or health visitor to arrange for your child to be immunised.

## If some diseases have disappeared from this country, why do we need to immunise against them?

In the UK, these diseases are kept at bay by high immunisation rates. Around the world, millions of people a year die from infectious diseases with more than 5 million of these being children under the age of five. Many of these deaths could be prevented by immunisation. As more people travel abroad and more people come to visit this country, there is a risk that they will bring these diseases into the UK. The diseases may spread to people who haven't been immunised so your baby is at greater risk if he or she has not been immunised. Immunisation doesn't just protect your child; it also helps to protect your family and the whole community, especially those children who, for medical reasons, can't be immunised.

## How do we know that vaccines are safe?

Before they are allowed to be used, all medicines (including vaccines) are thoroughly tested to assess how safe and effective they are. After they have been licensed, the safety of vaccines continues to be monitored. Any rare side effects that are discovered can then be assessed further. All medicines can cause side effects, but vaccines are among the very safest. Research from around the world shows that immunisation is the safest way to protect your child's health.

## I am worried that my baby will be upset by having an injection

Your baby may cry and be upset for a few minutes, but they will usually settle down after a cuddle.

## Will my baby have any side effects from the vaccine?

Some babies will have side effects. They may:

- have redness, swelling or tenderness where they had the injection (this will slowly disappear on its own)
- be a bit irritable and feel unwell, or
- have a temperature (fever)
- babies having the rotavirus vaccine may get mild diarrhoea

## I'm worried that my baby may have allergies. Can he or she have vaccines?

Yes. Asthma, eczema, hay fever, food intolerances and allergies do not prevent your child having any vaccine in the childhood immunisation programme. If you have any questions, speak to your doctor, practice nurse or health visitor.

## Are some babies allergic to vaccines?

Very rarely, children can have an allergic reaction soon after immunisation. This reaction may be a rash or itching affecting part or all of the body. The doctor or nurse giving the vaccine will know how to treat this. It does not mean that your child should stop having immunisations.

Even more rarely, children can have a severe reaction, within a few minutes of the immunisation, which causes breathing difficulties and can cause the child to collapse. This is called an anaphylactic reaction.

A recent study has shown that there is only one anaphylactic reaction in about a million immunisations. The people who give immunisations are trained to deal with anaphylactic reactions and children recover completely with treatment.

**An anaphylactic reaction** *is a severe and immediate allergic reaction that needs urgent medical attention.*

## **Are there any reasons why my baby should not be immunised?**

There are very few reasons why babies cannot be immunised. Vaccines should not be given to babies who have had:

- a confirmed anaphylactic reaction to a previous dose of the vaccine, or
- a confirmed anaphylactic reaction to neomycin, streptomycin, or polymyxin B (antibiotics that may be added to vaccines in very tiny amounts)

In general, children who are 'immunosuppressed' should not receive live vaccines. Children who are immunosuppressed include those:

- whose immune system does not work properly because they are undergoing treatment for a serious condition such as a transplant or cancer, or
- who have any condition which affects the immune system, such as severe primary immunodeficiency. (Primary immunodeficiencies are very rare diseases that mean you are more likely to catch infections. They are usually caused by a faulty gene and are diagnosed soon after birth)

If this applies to your child, you must tell your doctor, practice nurse or health visitor before the immunisation. They will need to get specialist advice on using live vaccines such as MMR, rotavirus vaccine and BCG. There are no other reasons why vaccines should definitely not be given.

## **What if my baby is ill on the day of the appointment?**

If your baby has a minor illness without a fever, such as a cold, they should have their immunisations as normal. If your baby is ill with a fever, put off the immunisation until they have recovered. This is to avoid the fever being associated with the vaccine, or the vaccine increasing the fever your child already has. If your baby:

- has a bleeding disorder (for example haemophilia, in which the patient's blood does not clot properly), or
- has had a fit not associated with fever

speak to your doctor, practice nurse or health visitor before your child has any immunisation.

## **What are fits?**

Fits are also called seizures or convulsions. Some are associated with fever and some are not. Seizures associated with fever (which may be called a febrile seizure or febrile convulsion) are rare in the first six months of life and are most common in the second year of life. After this age, they become less frequent and are rare after the age of five years. Most children who have febrile seizures recover fully. When a child has a seizure within a short time after immunisation, it might not have been caused by the vaccine or the fever. It could be due to an underlying medical condition.

If your baby has a fit after an immunisation, contact your doctor. He or she may refer you to a specialist for advice about further investigations and future immunisations. If the surgery is closed or if you can't contact your doctor, go straight to the emergency department of your nearest hospital.

## **My baby was born early. When should premature babies have their first immunisation?**

Premature babies may be at greater risk of infection. They should be immunised in line with the recommended schedule from eight weeks after birth, no matter how premature they were.

## **Does my baby have to be immunised?**

In the UK, parents can decide whether or not to have their children immunised. Vaccination is recommended because it gives your baby protection against serious diseases, most of which can kill. Around the world, many children are now routinely protected with vaccines. Because of this, some of the world's most serious diseases may soon disappear.

## How long do I have to wait before I can take my baby swimming?

You can take your baby swimming at any time before and after their immunisations.

## Is it safe to have several vaccinations in one go?

Yes; from birth, babies' immune systems protect them from the germs that surround them. Without this protection, babies would not be able to cope with the tens of thousands of bacteria and viruses that cover their skin, nose, throat and intestines. This protection carries on throughout life.

Studies have shown that it is safe to have several vaccinations at the same time and your baby will be protected from some very serious infections.

## Are there other ways to immunise my baby?

There is no other proven, effective way to immunise your child.

## Why is the immunisation programme changed from time to time?

Immunisation programmes are regularly reviewed to make sure that all children are offered the best protection against preventable diseases. As new vaccines become available, or research shows that giving existing vaccines at different times improves protection, the programme will be changed. Recent changes to the UK programme have been:

- giving hepatitis B vaccine at 8 weeks, 12 weeks and 16 weeks of age
- giving rotavirus vaccine at 8 weeks and 12 weeks of age
- giving MenB vaccine to babies at 8 weeks, 16 weeks and one year of age
- giving fu vaccine to all eligible primary school aged children
- giving MenACWY to young people around 14 years old
- giving HPV vaccine to boys as well as girls from September 2019
- giving a single priming dose of pneumococcal vaccine at 12 weeks of age instead of two doses at 8 and 16 weeks



**PROTECT YOUR CHILD**

**VACCINES GIVE THEM THE POWER TO FIGHT PREVENTABLE CHILDHOOD DISEASES**

If your child has missed any of their vaccinations, it's not too late to catch up.

To find out more contact your GP practice or visit [westsussex.gov.uk/childhood-immunisations](https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/childhood-immunisations)



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