



A Parent's Guide to *Vaccination*



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A Parent's Guide to *Vaccination*

Vaccines are an important way to protect your child from serious and life-threatening diseases. You can help keep them safe and healthy by making sure they get all recommended vaccines on time.





About *vaccination*

What are *vaccines*?

Vaccines are tools that work with the body's natural defences (the immune system) to develop protection against diseases without the risks that come from getting the diseases.

What is the immune system?

The immune system is a complex network of cells, tissues and organs in our bodies that work together to help prevent diseases and keep us healthy.

Our immune system responds to things it considers unfamiliar or harmful, such as bacteria and viruses that can cause diseases. Through a series of steps called the immune response, our bodies produce antibodies and immune memory cells to fight the infection and provide protection against future infections (immunity).

Antibodies are proteins that attach to harmful bacteria or viruses and help to remove them from the body. If we encounter that specific virus or bacterium again, immune memory cells quickly produce more antibodies to help remove it from the body before we get really sick.

Did you know?

Many bacteria are useful and can be naturally found in and on our body without making us sick, as long as they aren't in parts of the body where they don't belong. It's part of our immune system's job to determine which bacteria can make us sick and to develop an immune response if needed.



How does *vaccination* work?

Vaccination works by exposing our bodies to key parts of bacteria or viruses, called antigens, in a safe way so our immune system can develop an immune response. Later, if we are exposed to that same bacterium or virus, our immune system will be able to respond more quickly to:

- > prevent us from getting the disease
- > prevent us from getting seriously ill if we do get the disease

How are *vaccines* given?

Most vaccines are given by an injection (a needle) into your child's upper arm or thigh. Some vaccines can be given orally (by mouth) and there's a flu (influenza) vaccine that's sprayed into the nose.

Some vaccines offer life-long protection, while others require booster doses to continue providing protection.

Some vaccines protect against only one virus or bacterium, while combination vaccines protect against several at the same time. Combination vaccines are helpful as they mean fewer injections and fewer appointments, which can help reduce delays in getting vaccinated and building protection.

Children may need multiple doses of a vaccine to provide good protection. For example, DTaP-IPV-Hib is a combination vaccine which is generally given as 4 doses during the first 2 years of life. It protects against:

- > diphtheria
- > Hib (*haemophilus influenzae* type b)
- > polio
- > tetanus
- > whooping cough (pertussis)



Why is *vaccination* important?

Vaccination is considered one of our most important public health tools. Over the past 50 years, vaccination has saved many lives in Canada and around the world. Some childhood diseases that were once common in Canada are now rare because of vaccines.

Vaccination can even completely stop an infectious disease from occurring anywhere in the world. For example, there hasn't been a single case of naturally occurring smallpox in the entire world since 1977, thanks to vaccination.

Some vaccines can help to create community immunity (also known as herd immunity). This means that the more people who have been vaccinated against a disease, the less chance there is of the disease spreading in a community. This helps protect people who can't be vaccinated. It also helps protect those for whom the vaccine may not work as well, such as infants, older adults and people who are immunocompromised.

People who are immunocompromised have a weakened immune system due to a health condition or medications they take. They may not be able to receive certain vaccines, and the vaccines that they can receive may not work as well. These people are at higher risk of getting vaccine-preventable diseases and becoming very ill.

To compare the number of cases of 6 vaccine-preventable diseases before and after vaccines were introduced in Canada, check out the Vaccines Work Poster at Canada.ca/vaccines-work.



Did you know?

The more contagious a disease is, the more people need to be vaccinated to prevent it from spreading. For example, measles is one of the most contagious diseases: even a single case can spread quickly when people aren't vaccinated.

In a group of 100 people who have never had a measles infection, 95 of them need to be vaccinated against measles to prevent measles from spreading. This is why vaccination rates have to stay high to prevent outbreaks.



Diseases prevented by routine *vaccinations*

Routine vaccinations are recommended on a schedule based on your child's age. No matter where you live in Canada, all or almost all of these vaccines are provided for free by your province or territory.

These are some of the diseases that routine vaccinations help protect your child from. Some are given as combination vaccines:

- > chickenpox (varicella): Canada.ca/chickenpox
- > diphtheria: Canada.ca/diphtheria
- > flu (influenza): Canada.ca/flu
- > hepatitis B: Canada.ca/hepatitis-b
- > Hib (haemophilus influenzae type b):
Canada.ca/haemophilus
- > HPV (human papillomavirus): Canada.ca/hpv
**offered in school-based clinics*
- > measles: Canada.ca/measles
- > meningococcal: Canada.ca/meningococcal
- > mumps: Canada.ca/mumps
- > pneumococcal: Canada.ca/pneumococcal
- > polio (poliomyelitis): Canada.ca/polio
- > rotavirus: Canada.ca/rotavirus
- > rubella: Canada.ca/rubella
- > tetanus: Canada.ca/tetanus
- > whooping cough (pertussis):
Canada.ca/whooping-cough

The timing of vaccines may vary depending on your province or territory of residence. Talk to a health care provider or your local public health department about which vaccinations your child needs.

Other vaccines may also be recommended in certain situations. For example:

- > if your child is travelling to an area where certain viruses or bacteria are common
- > if your child may have been exposed to certain viruses or bacteria, for example, due to exposure to an infected person or animal or a contaminated object
- > during an outbreak of a disease
- > if your child has certain health conditions or risk factors



Will your child be travelling?

Some diseases that aren't common in Canada are common in other parts of the world. This means that when travelling to another country, your child could be exposed to viruses and bacteria that we don't routinely vaccinate against in Canada.

It is recommended that you consult a qualified travel health provider or visit a travel health clinic at least 6 weeks before your child is scheduled to travel. They might recommend other vaccinations based on where they are traveling to.

Visit travel.gc.ca/travel-vaccinations for helpful travel advice and information.

Yearly flu (influenza) *vaccination*

Influenza is a respiratory illness that can cause fever, cough, muscle aches, headache, sore throat and tiredness. Some people only get mildly ill, while others can get very sick.

Everyone aged 6 months and older is recommended to get an influenza vaccine every fall. This is because protection from the influenza vaccine may not last from one year to the next and the strains in the vaccine can change from year to year. Influenza vaccines target the 3 or 4 influenza strains that are expected to cause illness in the upcoming influenza season (November to April).

For their first ever influenza vaccine, children between the ages of 6 months and less than 9 years need 2 doses given a month apart. After that, they only need one influenza vaccine every fall.

By making sure your child is vaccinated against influenza, you can protect them and others too, since they'll be less likely to spread influenza to others.

For more information, talk to your health care provider, local public health department or visit Canada.ca/flu.

COVID-19 *vaccination*

COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Although COVID-19 is generally mild in children, some children can get quite sick. You can help protect your child from getting very sick with COVID-19 by getting them vaccinated.

For information on COVID-19 vaccines, visit Canada.ca/covid-vaccine.





Vaccine safety

When a vaccine is being considered for approval, Health Canada reviews how well the vaccine works and its safety before making a decision.

Once a vaccine has been approved, Health Canada continues to monitor its safety and its effectiveness, in cooperation with provinces and territories, other countries and international agencies.

After being vaccinated, it's common to have side effects that may last for 1 to 3 days. Most children tolerate vaccines well. In some cases, your child may be fussy, have a mild fever, be sleepier than usual, or have pain, swelling or redness where the injection was given.



Did you know?

Your child may have mild side effects for a few days after vaccination because their body is working to develop an immune response against the disease.

Some children may be afraid of receiving their vaccines. For tips on reducing pain and helping your child have a better vaccination experience, see the section: “What to expect at your child’s vaccination appointment”.

Serious side effects or allergic reactions to a vaccine are very rare. If you suspect your child might be having a serious reaction after a vaccination, seek medical care right away. Serious side effects from vaccines should also be reported to your local public health department. Tell your health care provider about any serious reactions your child has experienced before they receive future vaccinations.







Staying up to date with your child's *vaccination*

How do you know if your child is due for a *vaccine*?

For the best protection, your child needs to be vaccinated at various times throughout their life. Vaccination schedules (also referred to as immunization schedules) are designed to provide vaccines **before** children are likely to be exposed to the disease. Therefore, it is very important for children to be vaccinated on time.

You can find out which vaccines your child has had by looking at their personal vaccination record. Everyone should maintain a personal vaccination record throughout their life. Keep it in a safe place and present it at every vaccination appointment so it can be updated.

If your child doesn't have a personal vaccination record, contact their health care provider or your local public health department to get one.

To find out if your child is due for any vaccines, check the vaccination schedule of your province or territory or talk with a health care provider or your local public health department.

Vaccination schedules are available at Canada.ca/immunization-schedule.

What if my child missed a *vaccine*?

If your child hasn't received all recommended vaccines for their age, they can still catch up. It's important to get them back on schedule.

Book an appointment to speak to your child's health care provider or your local public health department as soon as possible. They can help you figure out:

- > which vaccines your child has already had
- > which ones they still need
- > when and where to get them

What if my child can't be *vaccinated*?

Children who are immunocompromised may not be able to receive certain vaccines. Immunocompromised means that the immune system may be weakened due to:

- > a health condition
- > certain medications

It's very important for people who live with or have close contact with a child who is immunocompromised to stay up to date with their vaccines. Talk to your child's health care provider about how to keep your child protected.

What if we move to another province or territory?

Vaccine schedules may differ depending on your province or territory. If you move to another province or territory, your child's vaccination schedule may change.

Once you have moved, contact your child's new health care provider or your new local public health department to find out which vaccines may be needed. Be sure to bring your child's personal vaccination record to your appointment so that the health care provider knows which vaccines your child has already had.





What to expect at your child's *vaccination* appointment

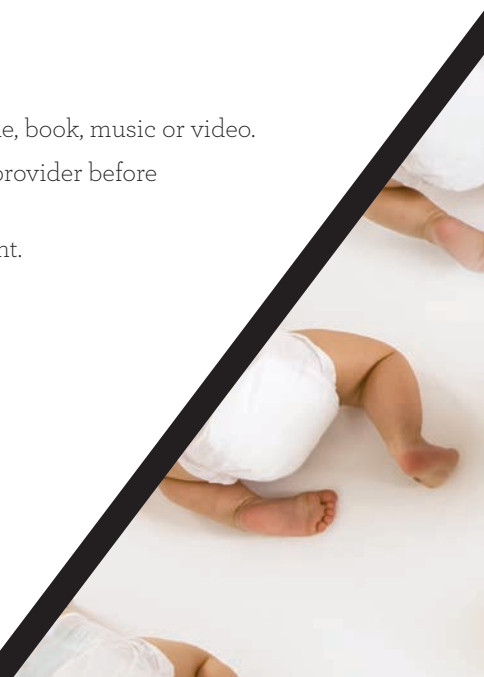
You can help your child have a positive vaccine experience. It will be easier if you know what to expect.

Before the appointment

- › Plan ahead to make the vaccination experience a more positive one.
 - › Consider bringing something to keep your child's mind off the vaccination, such as a game, book, music or video.
 - › If you or your child have fears or anxiety about vaccination, reach out to your health care provider before the appointment for options that might help.
- › If you have a personal vaccination record for your child, bring it with you to your appointment. If you don't have one, ask for one at your appointment.

For more information about preparing for your child's vaccination appointment visit

Canada.ca/vaccination-appointment-children.





During the appointment

Your child's health care provider may ask you a few questions about your child's health before vaccinating them. This is a great time to ask any questions you have about vaccines. If your child has had negative vaccination experiences, anxiety, or a serious reaction to a previous vaccination, be sure to tell the health care provider.

For a more comfortable vaccination experience, try the following strategies:

- > **Comfort your child** by holding and talking to them during the vaccination.
- > **If you are nursing, try feeding your baby or child right before, during or after the vaccination.** This will help to comfort them.
- > **Be calm.** Your child may react to your emotions. When you are calm and positive, they'll be more at ease.
- > **Distract.** Your soothing voice or touch can help comfort your child, as can a favourite toy, story or song.

Before leaving the clinic

Remind your health care provider to record the vaccination in your child's personal vaccination record. If you don't have one for your child, ask for one now.

Make an appointment for your child's next vaccination.

You'll be asked to wait for at least 15 minutes after the vaccination to make sure your child doesn't have an allergic reaction.

Serious allergic reactions to vaccines are very rare. Signs of a serious allergic reaction may include:

- > breathing problems (wheezing)
- > swelling of the face, tongue or throat
- > red rash on the skin (hives)

If you think your child is experiencing a serious allergic reaction, alert a staff member at the clinic right away. They have medication on hand to manage allergic reactions.

After the *vaccination*

Most children tolerate vaccines well. In some cases, your child may:

- > be fussy
- > have a mild fever
- > be sleepier than usual
- > have pain, swelling or redness where the injection was given

These reactions are normal and usually go away within a few days. You can give your child medication to help with the pain or to lower a fever. Check with your child's health care provider if you need advice about which medication to use.

When to call a health care provider after *vaccination*

If your child has symptoms that could be an allergic reaction, seek immediate medical attention. If your child has other symptoms that are getting worse or not going away, or you're worried about something, contact their health care provider or seek medical attention.

Did you know?

You can use the CARD system (Comfort, Ask, Relax, Distract) to find more strategies to help improve the vaccination experience. To learn more about the CARD system visit cardsystem.ca.





Did you know?

Misinformation is false or misleading information that is presented as fact. Disinformation is misinformation that is deliberately created and spread to deceive or mislead people. Misinformation and disinformation about vaccines are common. Be sure to get your information about vaccines from trusted and reputable sources.

Where to find more information

Your child's health care provider or your local public health department can provide you with more information about vaccines.

Here are some websites you can trust for vaccine information:

Government of Canada
Canada.ca/vaccines

The Canadian Paediatric Society
caringforkids.cps.ca

The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada
sogc.org

Immunize Canada
immunize.ca

There are other free resources on vaccines, including other vaccine guides:

An Adult's Guide to Vaccination:
Canada.ca/vaccination-guide-adult

A Teen's Guide to Vaccination:
Canada.ca/vaccination-guide-teen



Canada.ca/vaccines

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