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## SAFETY & PREVENTION

# Vaccine Safety: The Facts

Some people have expressed concerns about vaccine safety. **The fact is vaccines save lives and protect against the spread of disease.** If you decide not to immunize, you're not only putting your child at risk to catch a disease that is dangerous or deadly but also putting others in contact with your child at risk. Getting vaccinated is much better than getting the disease.

Indeed, some of the most devastating diseases that affect children have been greatly reduced or eradicated completely thanks to vaccination. **Today, we protect children and teens from 16 diseases** (</english/health-issues/vaccine-preventable-diseases/pages/default.aspx>) **that can have a terrible effect on their young victims if left unvaccinated.**

Your pediatrician knows that you care about your child's health and safety. That's why you need to get all the scientific facts from a medical professional you can trust before making any decisions based on stories you may have seen or heard on TV, the Internet, or from other parents.

## Your pediatrician cares about your child, too, and wants you to know that...



- **Vaccines work.** They have kept children healthy and have saved millions of lives for more than 50 years. Most childhood vaccines are 90% to 99% effective in preventing disease (</English/safety-prevention/immunizations/pages/Do-Immunizations-Really-Work.aspx>). And if a vaccinated child does get the disease, the symptoms are usually less serious than in a child who hasn't been vaccinated. There may be mild side effects, like swelling where the shot was given, but they do not last long. And it is rare for side effects to be serious (</English/safety-prevention/immunizations/pages/Vaccine-Side-Effects.aspx>).
- **Vaccines are safe.** Before a vaccine is licensed in the United States, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) reviews all aspects of development, including where and how the vaccine is made and the studies that have been conducted in people who received the vaccine. The FDA will not license a vaccine unless it meets standards for effectiveness (how well the vaccine works) and safety. Results of studies get reviewed again by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American Academy of Family Physicians before a licensed vaccine is officially recommended to be given to children. Every lot of vaccine is tested to ensure quality (including safety) before the vaccine reaches the public. In addition, FDA regularly inspects places where vaccines are made.
- **Vaccines are necessary.** Your pediatrician believes that your children should receive all recommended childhood vaccines (<file:///C:/English/safety-prevention/immunizations/pages/Recommended-Immunization-Schedules.aspx>). In the United States vaccines have protected children and continue to protect children from many diseases. However, in many parts of the world many vaccine-preventable diseases that are rarely seen in the United States are still common. Since some vaccine-preventable diseases still occur in the United States and others may be brought into the United States by Americans who travel abroad or from people visiting areas with current disease outbreaks, it's important that your children are vaccinated.
- **Vaccines are studied.** To monitor the safety of vaccines after licensure, the FDA and the CDC created the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS). All doctors must report certain side effects of vaccines to VAERS. Parents can also file reports with VAERS. For more information about VAERS, visit [www.vaers.hhs.gov](http://www.vaers.hhs.gov)

(<http://www.vaers.hhs.gov/>) or call the toll-free VAERS information line at 800/822-7967. Other systems exist to further study vaccine safety concerns if they are identified in VAERS by FDA and CDC.

## Protection for everyone

Just as important as the initial vaccinations are the booster shots. These are designed to continue immunity by building on the previous vaccines' effectiveness. Unfortunately, some parents forget or skip the boosters, which undercut the effectiveness of a very important concept in vaccination: *herd immunity*. Herd immunity is the benefit everyone receives from a vaccinated population once immunization reaches a critical level. When enough people are vaccinated, everyone—including those who are too young (</English/safety-prevention/immunizations/Pages/How-to-Cocoon-a-Newborn-Only-an-E-Mail-Away.aspx>) or too sick to be immunized—receives some protection from the spread of diseases. However, relying on herd immunity to keep your child safe is risky. The more parents that follow this way of thinking, the fewer vaccinated children we will have, and the more likely a serious disease will return and infect all of those unvaccinated.

In the rare case that a child has serious side effects to a vaccine, parents can contact the National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program (VICP) at 800/338-2382 or [www.hrsa.gov/vaccinecompensation](http://www.hrsa.gov/vaccinecompensation) (<http://www.hrsa.gov/vaccinecompensation/>). This federal program was created to help pay for the care of people who have been harmed.

If you have any additional questions or concerns, feel free to ask your pediatrician.

## Additional Information & Resources:

- Vaccine Studies: Examine the Evidence (</English/safety-prevention/immunizations/Pages/Vaccine-Studies-Examine-the-Evidence.aspx>)
- Vaccines Your Child Needs (</English/safety-prevention/immunizations/Pages/Vaccines-Your-Child-Needs.aspx>)
- Weighing the Risks and Benefits (</English/safety-prevention/immunizations/Pages/Weighing-the-Risks-and-Benefits.aspx>)
- [www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov) (<http://www.fda.gov/>) (Food and Drug Administration)
- [www.cdc.gov/vaccines](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines) (<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/>) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

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The information contained on this Web site should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

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