

# Immunisation, vaccination, and tips for making medicine taking easy!



Immunisation is the process whereby a person is made immune or resistant to an infectious disease, typically by the administration of a vaccine which boosts your immune system to protect you against subsequent infection or disease. Today there is much debate surrounding immunisation. Nevertheless, it has been proven a safe and effective way of safeguarding children against certain diseases - the guiding principle being that the risks of contracting the diseases outweigh any possible risks which may result from vaccination.

## What is a vaccination?

Vaccination triggers an immune response that provides protection against specifically targeted conditions (such as measles, mumps, chickenpox etc). Protection generally takes effect within 2 weeks of immunisation, but some vaccines need to be administered in more than one dose in order to provide maximum immunity.

All vaccines used in Australia are tested and passed as safe by the Therapeutic Goods Administration. However, just as with any other any medication, side effects can arise. It is advisable to know what kinds of reactions are possible and how to manage them if they do occur.

Severe reactions are extremely rare, but can include: high temperatures of more than 40°C, fainting, fits and anaphylaxis. These adverse reactions can happen with any vaccination, but are highly uncommon. All side effects should be measured against the potential consequences of the disease that your child is being immunised against.

## Adverse reactions

Around 1 in 100 children experience mild reactions to the MMR vaccination (an immunization vaccine against measles, mumps, and rubella). The reaction tends to occur 5 - 12 days after immunisation and generally last no more than 48 hours. The most common reaction is a general feeling of being unwell, accompanied by fever up to 39.4°C. Other potential reactions to the MMR vaccine are: symptoms of a cold (puffy eyes, runny nose, and cough) and swollen salivary glands (due to the mumps component of the vaccine). Sometimes a mild rash may develop 7 - 10 days later (due to the measles component of the vaccine), but this does not make your child infectious to others. Research has concluded that the MMR vaccine is unrelated to either autism or inflammatory bowel disease (IBO), including Crohn's disease.

The chickenpox vaccine is unsuitable for people with severe immune deficiency diseases, pregnant women, or people on high doses of immune-suppressing medications. One in five recipients have a local reaction or fever while 3-5 in 100 experience a mild varicella-like rash. The rash can develop up to 26 days after immunisation. If this happens to your child, avoid contact with people with low immunity until the rash clears.

***Babies are vulnerable to serious and life-threatening diseases. This is why we aim to protect babies as early in life as possible through vaccination.***

## Managing Adverse reactions

If your child appears to be having a severe reaction after being immunised, or if you are concerned in any way, seek medical assistance immediately.

Immunisation reactions are treated, recorded and reported, ensuring that vaccines are safely monitored.

Most reactions tend to happen soon after immunisation and last for around two days. Immunisation side effects are usually mild and can be managed at home. At times, symptoms can resemble some effects of the diseases that vaccination protects against, but are less severe and not usually dangerous.

The most common mild reactions are a low-grade fever, temporary loss of appetite, headache, irritability and localised swelling and soreness at the site of the injection.

Home treatment options include: boost your child's fluid intake by offering extra drinks; place a cool and soothing washcloth over the injection site; and give your child extra affection and reassurance. The routine use of paracetamol is no longer recommended after immunisation, but may be given if the fever exceeds 38.5°C, or in the case of pain or significant discomfort.

The Australian Childhood Immunisation Register keeps a record of your child's Australian vaccination history from 0 - 7 years. Children are automatically registered when they are enrolled in Medicare or when their immunisation details are processed.

Proof of immunisation is often required in order to receive certain benefits, and when children are enrolled in daycare, preschool or school. Vaccination is not compulsory in Australia and exemption certificates are permissible under certain conditions.

.....

**The best time to immunise against each disease varies. A mother's antibodies (passed onto baby during pregnancy and via breast milk) are temporary and won't fully protect a baby against all types of vaccine preventable diseases.**

**This is why it is important that your baby be fully immunised within the first 6 months of life. In Australia, babies start receiving vaccines at birth and again at 6 weeks, 4 months and 6 months of age.**

.....

## Medicine Taking Made Easy

- Keep the medicine chilled as this helps to mask unpleasant flavours.
- Offer a reward. Give children a healthy treat to follow the medicine. If all else fails, keep a bottle of chocolate or strawberry syrup on hand!
- Normalise the taking of medicine by teaching your child that 'we all do it'. Explain that it's sometimes necessary in order to be healthy.
- Involve your child whenever you need to take medicine. Let her see you on the receiving end, and get her to give you a spoonful!
- Relinquish some control. Giving your child a choice about where to take the medicine often helps them feel more involved in the process.
- Make a game of it. Name the medicine a silly but catchy name, in line with their interests: such as, 'Spiderman sauce' or 'the princess's potion'. If you do this however, be extra vigilant that the medicine is kept in a safe place so that your child doesn't try to reach it herself another time.
- Use a medicine syringe and aim for the back of the cheek. Hard to spit out, and easy to slide down!
- Always make sure medicines are in child resistant containers, in locked cupboards or in high places where children can't reach them (even if they climb).

### Want more information?

Immunisation hotline 1800 671 811

More details about childhood immunisation can be obtained from: [www.immunise.health.gov.au](http://www.immunise.health.gov.au)

You can request immunisation history statements by calling your local Medicare office, or  
Phone 1800 653 809  
[www.medicareaustralia.gov.au](http://www.medicareaustralia.gov.au)

#### Parent Helpline:

Phone 1300 1300 52

9am - 9pm weekdays and 4pm - 9pm weekends  
for advice on child health and parenting

#### Goonellabah Child and Family Health Centre:

Phone 02 6625 0111

9am - 4:30pm, Monday to Friday to make an appointment.

