A guide to pre-school immunisations for 3- to 5-year-olds

Includes information on a new diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough and polio vaccine.
Introduction

This guide is for parents of children aged three to five years old. It provides information on the routine immunisations that are given to children before they start school to protect them from serious childhood diseases. It also describes these diseases and explains why young children need protection against them. It also answers some of the most common questions about pre-school immunisation.

In particular, it describes new vaccines, called dTaP/IPV or DTaP/IPV, that boost the protection your child got as a baby from their primary (first) immunisations against diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (whooping cough) and polio. See page 9 for an explanation of the differences between dTaP/IPV and DTaP/IPV.

If you have more questions or you want more information, talk to your doctor, practice nurse or health visitor.

You can also visit the websites at www.immunisation.nhs.uk and www.mmrthefacts.nhs.uk, or call NHS Direct on 0845 46 47.

Why has the vaccine against diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough and polio been changed?

As polio has mostly been wiped out through a worldwide vaccination programme, the risk of polio infection being brought into the UK is very low. This means that a switch can be made from a ‘live’ oral polio vaccine (OPV, given by mouth) that provides better community-wide protection, to an ‘inactivated’ polio vaccine (IPV), which provides effective individual protection.

What is the benefit of the new vaccine?

As the polio vaccine is inactivated (that is, it is not live), it does not carry the slight risk of causing vaccine-associated paralytic polio (that is, when the vaccine itself causes paralysis) that the previous live oral vaccine carried.
But my daughter was given the old vaccine when she had her first three immunisations as a baby. Is it all right for her to have the new vaccine now?

The old and new vaccines are compatible, so she will be fully protected as long as she completes the programme of immunisations (see back cover).

There is more detailed information in the factsheet about the new vaccines which you can get from the website below or from your doctor’s surgery or practice nurse. If you have more questions about the new vaccine or any of the other ones described in this leaflet, speak to your doctor, practice nurse or health visitor.

You can also visit www.immunisation.nhs.uk or call NHS Direct on 0845 46 47.

Timetable of pre-school immunisations

These immunisations are due about three years after your child has completed the immunisations they had when they were two, three and four months old. You will receive an appointment for you to bring your child for their pre-school immunisations.

The table below shows you which pre-school immunisations your child will be offered. These immunisations will make sure that your child has the best protection against serious childhood diseases as they grow up.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vaccine</th>
<th>How it is given</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (whooping cough) and polio (dTaP/IPV, DTaP/IPV)</td>
<td>One injection</td>
<td>This is a booster dose of the vaccine your child had as a baby, but without the Hib part.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measles, mumps and rubella (MMR)</td>
<td>One injection</td>
<td>This is a second dose of the MMR vaccine. (If your child has not had the first dose yet, it should be given now and they should have their second dose in three months’ time.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Common questions about pre-school immunisations

Why does my child need to be immunised at this age?
Protection (immunity) against diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough and polio can fade over time. Also, immunity to measles, mumps and rubella may not develop after a single dose of the MMR vaccine. The pre-school immunisations – often called pre-school boosters – will top up your child’s level of antibodies (the substances our bodies produce to fight off disease and infection) and help to keep them protected.

When you take your child for their pre-school immunisations, you will have the chance to make sure their other immunisations are up to date.

How does immunisation work?
Vaccines contain a small part of the bacterium or virus that causes a disease, or tiny amounts of the chemicals the bacterium produces. Vaccines work by causing the body’s immune system to make antibodies. 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 polio and diphtheria have effectively disappeared from this country.

If your child missed any of their immunisations as a baby or toddler, this is a good time to ask the surgery or clinic about catch-up doses. It is never too late to have your child immunised. You don’t have to start the course of immunisations from the beginning again.

How do we know that vaccines are safe?
Before a vaccine is licensed, its safety and effectiveness have to be thoroughly tested. 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.
Do these vaccines contain thiomersal?
Thiomersal is a mercury-based preservative (see glossary on page 19). These new pre-school vaccines do not contain thiomersal.

We don't hear about most of these diseases any more, so are these immunisations really necessary?
Since immunisation was introduced in the UK, the number of children catching these diseases has fallen to an all-time low. But if children do not continue to be immunised, the diseases will come back. The diseases are still around in Europe and throughout the world and, as people travel more, there is always a risk that the diseases will be brought into the country and your child will catch them.

Will there be any side effects from the vaccines?
There may be side effects, but they are usually mild. Your child may get a little redness or swelling where the injection was given. This will disappear on its own. Some children may get a fever. You can treat the fever by giving your child paracetamol or ibuprofen liquid. Read the instructions on the bottle carefully and give your child the correct dose for their age. If necessary, give them a second dose four to six hours later. If your child’s temperature is still high after they have had a second dose, speak to your doctor or call NHS Direct on 0845 46 47.

Remember, never give aspirin to children under 16 years old.

I’m worried that my son may have allergies. Can he have the vaccine?
Asthma, eczema, hay fever and allergies do not prevent your child having any vaccine in the routine childhood immunisation programme. If you have any questions, speak to your doctor, practice nurse or health visitor.

Are some children allergic to vaccines?
Very rarely, children can have an allergic reaction soon after immunisation. This 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 these reactions.