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

Important new information to replace that on page 4:
Never give aspirin to children under 16 years old.
This advice comes from the Committee on Safety of Medicines, October 2002.

Includes advice on recognising meningitis and septicaemia.
Introduction

This guide is for parents of children aged three to five years old. It explains all about the immunisations that are given to children before they start school, why they need these immunisations and what side effects they might have. It also answers some of the most common questions about pre-school immunisation.

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.
Timetable of pre-school immunisations

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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vaccine</th>
<th>How it is given</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diphtheria, tetanus and acellular pertussis (whooping cough) (DTap)</td>
<td>One injection</td>
<td>This is a booster dose of a similar vaccine your child had as a baby.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polio</td>
<td>By mouth</td>
<td>This is a booster dose of a vaccine your child had as a baby.</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, then 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 immunisation

Why does my child need to be immunised before they start school?
Some of the immunisations that children are given when they are babies may not be enough to protect them throughout their school years. Immunity (protection) to diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough and polio can fade over time. Immunity to measles, mumps and rubella may not develop, or it may be low, after a single dose of the MMR vaccine. The pre-school immunisations will top up your child’s level of antibodies (substances in the body that fight off disease) and help to keep them protected.

When you take your child for their pre-school immunisations, you will also have the chance to make sure their other immunisations are up to date. For example, if they have missed their MMR or MenC vaccine, they can have it now.

How does immunisation work?
Vaccines make your child’s immune system produce enough antibodies to protect them against disease. If your child comes into contact with any of the diseases they have been immunised against, the antibodies they have produced will protect them.

If your child has 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.
Common questions about pre-school immunisation  

How do we know that the vaccines are safe?  
Before anyone can be given a vaccine, it has to go through many tests to check that it is safe and that it works. All medicines can cause side effects, but vaccines are among the very safest. Only vaccines that pass all of the safety tests are used.

Research from around the world shows that immunisation is the safest way to protect your child's health.

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 are not immunised, the diseases could come back. Some are still around in Europe and throughout the world and there is still a risk of your child catching 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 get a fever. You can treat the fever by giving your child liquid paracetamol. 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.

Remember, never give aspirin to children under 12 years old

Follow your instincts and contact your doctor if you are worried about your child.

Are there any reasons why my child should not be immunised?  
There are very few reasons why children should not be immunised. But when you take your child for their immunisation, you should let your health visitor, doctor or practice nurse know if your child:
- has a fever;
- has had a bad reaction to any earlier immunisation;
- has had treatment for cancer or other serious conditions;
- has a severe (anaphylactic) allergy to eggs;
- has had a bleeding disorder;
- has had convulsions (fits).

You should also let them know if your child or any other close family member:
- has any illness which affects the immune system, for example HIV or AIDS
- is taking any medicine which affects the immune system – for example, immunosuppressants (given after organ transplant or for cancer) or high-dose steroids.

Ask your doctor, practice nurse or health visitor if you are not sure whether your child should be immunised.
Immunisations for pre-school children

DTaP vaccine
The DTaP vaccine protects against diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis (whooping cough).

What is diphtheria?
Diphtheria is a serious disease that usually begins with a sore throat and can quickly develop to cause problems with breathing. It can damage the heart and nervous system, and it can kill. Diphtheria can be spread by close contact with an infected person.

What is tetanus?
Tetanus is a painful disease that affects the muscles and can cause breathing problems. It is caused by germs that are found in soil and manure and can get into the body through open cuts or burns. Tetanus affects the central nervous system and it can kill.

What is pertussis (whooping cough)?
Whooping cough is a disease that can cause long bouts of coughing and choking which can make it hard to breathe. It can last for up to 10 weeks. It is not usually serious in older children, but it can be very serious in babies under one year old.

How effective is the DTaP vaccine?
Many studies have shown that the DTaP vaccine is very effective. DTaP has been given to children in the United States and some other European countries for a number of years.

Research has shown that the immunity to whooping cough from the vaccines that children are given at two, three and four months of age may not last as they get older. The DTaP booster will not only protect your child but will also prevent the diseases being passed on to babies who are too young to have had all of their immunisations.

Are there any side effects from the DTaP vaccine?
Your child may have redness and swelling where they had the injection, but this will usually disappear in a few days. A hard lump may appear in the same place but this will also go, usually over a few weeks. Occasionally, children may be unwell and irritable and develop a temperature.

What is the difference between the DTaP vaccine and the DTP vaccine that babies are given at two, three and four months old?
The whole-cell (wP) pertussis (whooping cough) part of the DTP vaccine works well for babies but it causes a higher rate of mild reactions in older children. The acellular pertussis vaccine (aP) is more suitable for older children.