Watch out for meningitis and septicaemia (blood poisoning)

Children are given Hib and MenC injections as babies. These offer protection against two common types of bacterial infection which cause meningitis and septicaemia. However, they do not protect against any other types of infection which can also cause these conditions. So it is important to know the signs and symptoms of the diseases.

Early symptoms of meningitis are mild and they are similar to the symptoms of flu, for example, a fever, vomiting, being irritable and pain in the back or joints.

Look out for one or more of the following symptoms:
- red or purple spots that don’t fade under pressure (do the glass test – see below)
- a stiff neck – can your child kiss their knee or touch it with their forehead?
- sleepiness or confusion
- a very bad headache, and
- a dislike of lights.

To do the glass test, press the side of a clear glass against the rash and see if the rash fades and loses colour. If it doesn’t, contact your doctor immediately.

If your child becomes ill with one or more of these signs or symptoms, contact your doctor urgently. If you are still worried after getting advice, trust your instincts and take your child to the nearest accident and emergency department.
Pre-school immunisations
You will be contacted for an appointment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aged 3 to 5 years</th>
<th>How it is given</th>
<th>Common side effects</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DTaP vaccine (against Diphtheria, Tetanus and acellular Pertussis whooping cough)</td>
<td>One injection</td>
<td>Some redness and swelling, or a hard lump where the injection is given. Occasionally children may be unwell with a temperature</td>
<td>This is a top-up (booster) dose of a vaccine your child had as a baby. A further dose of diphtheria and tetanus is given between the ages of 13 and 18.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Polio vaccine</td>
<td>By mouth</td>
<td>No common side effects</td>
<td>This is a booster dose of a similar vaccine your child had as a baby. A further dose is given between the ages of 13 and 18.</td>
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<tr>
<td>MMR vaccine (against Measles, Mumps and Rubella)</td>
<td>One injection</td>
<td>Fever and measles-like rash 7-10 days after injection, though this is less common after a second dose.</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>
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</tbody>
</table>

For more details on diseases and side effects, see the booklet A guide to pre-school immunisations for 3 to 5 year olds.

Why do children need to be immunised before they start school?
The protection (immunity) given to babies by their first immunisations may not be enough to see them through their school years. As a result, they are given a top-up dose of vaccine (sometimes called a booster) before starting school. This helps to keep them protected from disease.

If your child has missed any immunisations as a baby or toddler, they can have catch-up doses now. It is never too late to have your child immunised, even if they are older than the recommended ages. Your child is at risk if they have not been immunised.

Travel advice for children
Your child may need extra immunisations if they are going abroad. Contact your doctor or a travel clinic for up-to-date information on the immunisations your child may need.

Further information
The following leaflets contain further information on vaccines and the diseases they protect against. They are available from your local GP surgery or health centre:
- A new guide to childhood immunisations for babies up to 15 months
- A guide to pre-school immunisations for 3 to 5 year olds
- MMR - The facts

You can also
- visit www.immunisation.org.uk
- call NHS Direct on 0845 46 47.