
Immunisation – common questions

Summary

- Immunisation describes the process of you becoming protected against harmful diseases.
 - Immunisation saves lives. It protects you, your family and your community. And it also helps protect future generations.
 - Immunisation is one of the best ways you can protect your child from harmful infectious diseases
 - The other benefit of immunising your child is that you also protect those people in the community who cannot be immunised (usually because they are too young or too sick).
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What is immunisation?

Immunisation describes the process of you becoming protected against (that is, immune) harmful diseases. This happens when you are fully immunised for that disease.

Why is immunisation important?

Immunisation saves lives. It protects you, your family and your community. And it also helps protect future generations.

Up until the 1950s, thousands of Australian children died every year from infectious diseases such as diphtheria, smallpox, measles and polio. Immunisation programs have controlled and, in some cases, wiped out these diseases in Australia.

How do vaccines work?

Vaccines work by using your body's immune system to build protection to specific diseases before you come into contact with them. If you come into contact with a disease after you've been immunised, your body will remember it and respond quickly, preventing the disease from developing. This means that you are safe from many harmful diseases because you have been immunised.

Should I immunise my child?

Yes. Immunisation is one of the best ways you can protect your child from harmful infectious diseases. Some illnesses – like measles and mumps – can have serious implications (even death) for children. And, if a child passes on their illness to an adult, that adult may suffer even more serious effects.

The other benefit of immunising your child is that you also protect those people in the community who cannot be immunised (usually because they are too young or too sick).

What is the National Immunisation Program (NIP) schedule?

The **National Immunisation Program (NIP)** is the up-to-date immunisation schedule recommended for Australians.

It sets out the vaccines that your child should have and when they should have them. It also gives information on immunisation for teenagers and other at-risk groups in the community. The Victorian Government funds some extra vaccinations for people in special risk categories who need additional protection.

By following the current NIP, you protect your child from a number of infectious diseases:

- chicken pox
 - diphtheria
 - haemophilus influenza type b (Hib)
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- hepatitis B
- human papillomavirus (HPV)
- influenza (flu)
- measles
- meningococcal A,C,W,Y
- mumps
- pneumococcal
- poliomyelitis
- rotavirus (for babies under six months)
- rubella (German measles)
- tetanus
- whooping cough (pertussis).

Where can I get immunised?

There are many recognised **immunisation providers**, including GPs and immunisation nurses at local councils and community-based clinics. In Victoria, each local government authority runs free immunisation sessions for people eligible to be immunised under the NIP schedule.

Visit **Know Your Council** to find your local government authority.

How much does it cost to get immunised?

All NIP and Victorian Government supplied vaccinations are provided free of charge for eligible age groups. Sometimes your health care provider (for example, your GP) may charge a consultation fee. It is best to check when you make your appointment.

How do I know when to take my child for a vaccination?

Your Maternal and Child Health nurse will talk with you about your child's immunisation at each visit. You can also view the **NIP schedule**, which tells you at what age your child needs to be immunised.

You can download the **VaxOnTime app** to remind you when immunisations for your child are due.

What should I do if my child misses an immunisation on the NIP schedule?

The best thing to do is to talk to your GP or immunisation provider as soon as you can. They will help you organise a **'catch-up' immunisation schedule** to get your child's immunisation back on track.

The **VaxOnTime app** is a great way to keep track of when your child's immunisations are due.

Do I need to be immunised?

Maybe. You should talk to your GP about immunisation if you are:

- a parent, grandparent or carer looking after a baby or young children
- an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- **pregnant** (or planning to become pregnant)
- **65 years or older**
- planning to **travel outside Australia**
- medically at risk due to certain conditions or treatment, or come into contact with people who are
- have a job that may put you at increased risk of a harmful infectious disease
- have a lifestyle activity that may put you at increased risk of a harmful infectious disease.

Does my teenager need extra immunisations?

Yes. The **NIP schedule** sets out immunisation requirements for teenagers aged around 12 to 13 years. The Victorian Government funds the meningococcal A,C,W,Y vaccine to teenagers around 15 to 16 years of age. These **immunisations are given to teenagers at secondary school**, so you don't need to remember to take

them to the doctor. They are provided free of charge and administered by immunisation nurses on the secondary school premises.

The immunisations administered through the secondary school program protect your teenager from:

- diphtheria, tetanus and whooping cough (one injection)
- human papillomavirus (HPV) (usually a course of two injections a minimum of six months apart. An immunocompromised child will need a course of three doses over a six month period)
- meningococcal A,C,W,Y (one injection).

Does immunisation have any side effects?

Vaccines, just like any medication, can have **side effects**. But the side effects are mostly mild and usually clear up after a few days. More serious reactions to immunisation are very rare, but they can happen. If you are having serious reaction to immunisation, see a doctor immediately.

For more information, head to [Immunisation side effects](#).

Are vaccines safe?

Yes. All vaccines used in Australia are rigorously tested by the **Therapeutic Goods Administration** before and after they are approved. And, even once they are being used, they continue to be constantly monitored for safety and effectiveness.

You'll find more information about vaccine safety on our page about why immunisation is important.

Remember, you are much safer being immunised than not being immunised. Immunisations give you the best protection from harmful infectious diseases.

What is herd immunity?

Herd immunity is when enough people in the community are immunised that the spread of a disease slows down or stops completely. Herd immunity protects people who cannot be immunised (mostly because they are too young or too sick).

If immunisation levels fall below a certain level (which varies for each disease), herd immunity can break down and result in an outbreak of the infectious disease.

How do I get a copy of my child's immunisation history?

A record of your child's immunisation history is kept on the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR). You can obtain a copy by using your Medicare online account through [myGov](#) or the [Express Plus Medicare mobile app](#). Or you can visit your local Medicare office.

Make sure you keep your address updated so you can receive your certificate.

You can also contact AIR by:

- telephoning 1800 653 809
- visiting www.medicareaustralia.gov.au/online.

Go to the [Department of Human Services website](#) for more information.

How do I meet the immunisation conditions linked to some family assistance payments?

To receive the Family Tax Benefit Part A supplement and Child Care Benefit, your child must:

- be up to date with their immunisations (according to the [NIP schedule](#))
- OR
- have a medical exemption.

See the [Department of Health and Human Services website](#) for more information.

Can my child attend childcare or kindergarten if they have not been immunised?

Under the ['No Jab, No Play' legislation](#) (which was introduced in January 2016), to have an enrolment confirmed

for a child in long day care, kindergarten, family day care or occasional care, parents/carers have to provide the service with:

- a current Immunisation History Statement from the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR); AND
- the statement must show that the child is up to date with all vaccinations that are due for their age, or that they are able to receive.

The Immunisation History Statement from the AIR lists the vaccines the child has received and, if applicable, which vaccines are due in the future and when. Medical exemption may also be listed, where applicable.

Where can I get more information about immunisation?

Health professionals

Find out more about immunisation by speaking with your health professional. The best place to start is with your GP. You can also ask your maternal and child health nurse and paediatrician.

Online information

There is also lots of information online. When looking for immunisation information, stick to reliable information providers, such as:

- Better Health Channel
- **Raising Children Network**
- **Melbourne Vaccine Education Centre (MVEC)**
- **NPS Medicinewise**
- **National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance (NCIRS)**.

Where to get help

- In an emergency, always call triple zero (000)
- NURSE-ON-CALL Tel. 1300 60 60 24 – for expert health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days)
- Immunisation Program, Department of Health & Human Services, Victorian Government Tel. 1300 882 008
- National Immunisation Information Line Tel. 1800 671 811
- Maternal and Child Health Line (24 hours) Tel. 132 229
- SAEFVIC Tel. 1300 882 924 – the line is attended between 10 am and 3.30 pm and you can leave a message at all other times

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