Summary

- In Australia, immunisations are available to protect you from preventable diseases.
- You should get enough information on the risks and benefits of the vaccine to make an informed decision about whether to have that immunisation.
- The information you get should also include information on side effects, how common they are, and what you can do about them.

In Australia, immunisations are available to protect you from preventable diseases.

Before you have a vaccination, your GP or immunisation provider will ask you a number of questions to:

- work out whether there are any risks to your health
- ensure you have all the information you need before deciding to be immunised.

This pre-screening can also determine what vaccines you need based on your health, age, lifestyle and occupation (HALO).

This immunisation checklist will help you prepare so you know what to expect, and what information you will need to give your GP or clinic staff.

Who provides immunisation?

There are many different reasons why people need to be immunised. **Who delivers them can also vary.**

In Victoria, immunisation providers include:

- local councils
- GPs
- specially qualified nurses in clinics and community health services
- travel clinics
- some pharmacies and hospitals.

Some vaccines are free for eligible children and adults under the Australian Government’s [National Immunisation Program](https://www2.health.gov.au/immunise) and the [Victorian government vaccine programs](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/immunisation), while others are provided at a cost.

What to tell your GP or clinic nurse

Before receiving a vaccine, tell your GP (doctor) or nurse if the person about to be immunised:

- is unwell on the day of vaccination
- has a disease which lowers immunity (for example, leukaemia, cancer, HIV, SCID)
- is having treatment which lowers immunity (for example, oral steroid medicines such as cortisone and prednisone, disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs [DMARDs], radiotherapy, chemotherapy)
- is an infant of a mother who was receiving highly immunosuppressive therapy (for example, biological disease modifying anti-rheumatic drugs [bDMARDs] during pregnancy
- has had a severe reaction following any vaccine
- has any severe allergies (to anything)
- has had any vaccine in the past month
- has had an injection of immunoglobulin, or received any blood products, or a whole blood transfusion in the past year

is pregnant
is planning a pregnancy or anticipating parenthood
is a parent, grandparent or carer of an infant aged up to six months
has a past history of Guillain-Barré syndrome
was a preterm baby born at less than 32 weeks gestation, or weighing less than 2000g at birth
is a baby who has had intussusception, or a congenital abnormality that may predispose to intussusception
has a chronic illness
has a bleeding disorder
does not have a functioning spleen
lives with someone who has a disease which lowers immunity (for example, leukaemia, cancer, HIV)
lives with someone who is having treatment which lowers immunity (for example, oral steroid medicines such as cortisone and prednisone, disease modifying anti-rheumatic drugs [DMARDs] radiotherapy, chemotherapy)
identifies as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person
is planning travel
has an occupation or lifestyle factor/s for which vaccination may be needed.

Questions from your GP or clinic nurse

Before they go ahead with any immunisation, your GP or clinic staff will ask if you:

understand the information you’ve been given about the immunisation
need any more information before you decide whether to vaccinate
have brought any vaccination records with you.

Pre-immunisation screening

Doctors and clinic staff have to thoroughly screen everyone before they give a vaccine. They should:

ensure they have the right person to be vaccinated
ensure they are giving the correct vaccine and dose, according to the schedule, including catching up on missed vaccines
consider whether they should offer any alternative or additional vaccines
ensure the person being immunised is within the appropriate age range for that vaccine
check that enough time has passed since any previous vaccines.

Do you have all the information you need?

There’s a lot of information available about immunisation, and it’s easy for people to feel overwhelmed or not know where to start.

You may have questions such as:

Why is immunisation important?

What vaccines do I or someone in my care need?

What are the benefits of immunisation?

How safe are vaccines?

Are there any side effects?

What should I do if there are reactions to a vaccine?

Don’t be afraid to ask your GP or clinic nurse if you’re unsure. If you have young children, a maternal and child health nurse, or paediatrician can also help.

In fact, before you agree to any vaccines, your immunisation provider has to give you all the information you need to understand what is happening, answer any questions you may have and discuss your options.

And the information has to be given to you in a language you can understand, so if you need an interpreter or a

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cultural support person, your GP or clinic nurse should offer you one.

You should get enough information on the risks and benefits of the vaccine for you to make an informed decision about whether to have that immunisation. This information will also include any side effects, how common they are, and what you can do about them.

**Consent is important**

You must consent (in writing or verbally) before a vaccine can be given. Parents or guardians may be asked to complete a consent form for children (under 18 years) whether or not they choose to have their child vaccinated.

Your consent must be voluntary, without any pressure, coercion or manipulation. And you do not have to give your consent until your immunisation provider has explained the risks and benefits.

Remember, you can take your time before making a decision about immunisation.

**Recording immunisation history**

It is important to have an immunisation record. Your vaccine provider should give you a record of the vaccinations received for you to keep at home.

All immunisation providers should notify the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) about every vaccine they administer.

The register started for children in 1996 then expanded to adults from September 2016. Remind your vaccine provider to notify the register each time you are vaccinated.

There are a number of ways to access immunisation records on the AIR. The quickest is to request an Immunisation History Statement by using a Medicare online account through myGov or the Express Plus Medicare mobile app.

You can also:

- phone the Australian Immunisation Register enquiry line on 1800 653 809 (Monday to Friday from 8.00am – 5.00pm)
- visit your local Medicare or Centrelink office.

Records prior to 1996 were usually kept locally, (such as with the local council immunisation service, GP, hospital or travel clinic). They may also have been recorded in a baby health book and given to parents or carers to keep at home.

**Keeping childhood immunisations up to date**

Once children have started immunisation, it is really important to keep their vaccinations up to date to help protect them from serious childhood infections.

It is also a legal requirement to provide an Immunisation History Statement when you enrol your child in childcare, kindergarten or primary school in Victoria.

One of the most common reasons children fall behind in their immunisations is because parents simply forget, especially as the vaccinations become more spread out.

Your local council or GP can immunise your child to ‘catch up’ on any missed vaccine doses.

**Where can I get more information about immunisation?**

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 clinic nurse or specialist.

There is also a lot of information online. If you would like to know more about immunisation, check out the Australian Government’s National Immunisation Program website.

When looking for immunisation information, stick to reliable information providers, such as:

- Better Health Channel
- Raising Children Network

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Where to get help

- Your GP (doctor)
- In an emergency, always call triple zero (000)
- Your local government immunisation service – (visit Know Your Council to find your local government authority)
- **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
- Pharmacist
- **Victorian vaccine safety service (SAEFVIC)** Tel. 1300 882 924 (select option 1)– the line is attended between 9 am and 4 pm and you can leave a message at all other times

This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:

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