

# Vaccine facts for parents and families

Knowing the facts about vaccines is important to keeping your child healthy and safe. Use this guide to understand common concerns and get the facts you need about vaccines.

## Are vaccines safe for my child?

Yes. Vaccines are very safe. The United States has a longstanding system to make sure vaccines are safe. Millions of children safely receive vaccines each year.

## Has Massachusetts changed its recommendations for childhood vaccines?

No. Massachusetts uses the [American Academy of Pediatrics \(AAP\) Recommended Child and Adolescent Immunization Schedule](#) for vaccine recommendations for infants, children, and adolescents. Doctors and experts in childhood health created the schedule and update it regularly with the latest research and best practices. Vaccines will continue to be available in Massachusetts for all children regardless of insurance.

## What are the benefits and side effects of vaccines?

Vaccines can protect your child from infectious diseases that can be harmful or deadly, including measles or whooping cough (pertussis). Most side effects, such as a low-grade fever, fussiness, or a sore arm, are mild and usually go away within a few days. These are normal signs that your child's body is learning how to fight the disease.

If your baby is fussy or uncomfortable after getting their vaccine, you can apply a cool, wet washcloth to the sore area. While serious side effects are extremely rare, the benefits of staying protected are much greater than the risk of possible side effects.

## Is there a link between vaccines and autism?

No. Major health organizations, including the [AAP](#) and the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#), and research continues to show no relationship between vaccines and autism. For decades, researchers have studied vaccines among millions of children. In these studies, researchers compared vaccinated children with unvaccinated children. They consistently find no increased risk of autism in the children who received vaccines.

## Are vaccines safe if I am pregnant?

Yes. Certain vaccines are safe and recommended during pregnancy, including those for pertussis (whooping cough), RSV, COVID-19, and flu. These vaccines protect you and provide your baby with early protection during their first months of life when they are too young to be vaccinated themselves. For more information, please visit: [Patient Education Videos: Recommended Vaccinations During Pregnancy | ACOG](#)

## Can vaccines overload my baby's immune system?

No. A child's body fights off many germs every day. Germs have parts called antigens that tell the body's immune system to build antibodies and fight off diseases. When a baby gets a vaccine, their immune system builds antibodies. This prepares their body to fight and kill the actual germ if they come into contact with it. Vaccines are a safe way for the body to learn to fight off diseases.

## Will my child still be protected from illness if I wait to give them vaccines later?

Vaccines protect children best when given on time. Many serious diseases, like whooping cough and Hib, are more dangerous for children under 2 years old. Waiting to give your child's vaccines can put their health at risk. They could catch these diseases at everyday places like the playground or grocery store.

Following the [recommended schedule](#) from the AAP protects your baby when they need it most.

## Haven't we gotten rid of most of these diseases in this country?

Vaccines help prevent many diseases. Some diseases that can be prevented with vaccines, like whooping cough and chickenpox, are still common in the United States. Other diseases are no longer common in the U.S. because of vaccines are successfully preventing them.

However, if we stopped vaccinating, the few cases of infectious diseases we have in the U.S. could quickly turn into thousands. While vaccines have made many diseases rare in the U.S., they have not been eliminated worldwide. These illnesses can still be brought into our communities through travel. Continuing to vaccinate is essential because without it, the small number of cases we see today—such as measles—could quickly lead to widespread outbreaks. Staying up to date on vaccines ensures that our families and communities are protected from these diseases now and for generations to come.

## Don't babies have natural immunity? Isn't it better than vaccination?

Babies may get some temporary protection from their parent's antibodies. However, this only lasts a short time and only covers diseases the parent is immune to. While natural immunity comes from getting sick, the risks are much greater. For example, catching chickenpox can lead to serious problems like pneumonia, whereas the vaccine typically only causes minor side effects like a sore arm.

## Can I wait to vaccinate my baby if I am breastfeeding?

It's important to vaccinate your baby even when they're breastfeeding. Breast milk provides important protection from some infections as your baby's immune system is developing. For example, breastfed babies have a lower risk of ear infections, respiratory tract infections, and diarrhea. However, it cannot protect your baby against many serious, vaccine-preventable diseases. Babies are most at risk for illness when they are very young. If you wait to vaccinate, they won't be protected when they need it most. Staying up to date on vaccines ensures that your baby has the strongest possible protection to stay safe and healthy.

