

# Immunisation protects

Every hero needs a shield.  
Don't forget to give  
your child theirs.



# Vaccination protects your child from serious diseases

**Vaccination is the most important thing you can do to protect your child against ill health.**

After clean water, vaccinations are the most effective public health intervention in the world for saving lives, promoting good health and preventing serious illness.

The World Health Organization (WHO) states 4-5 million childhood deaths are prevented through childhood vaccination every year. Vaccination also helps children avoid serious health complications.



## Why is childhood immunisation important?

Vaccination is a safe and effective way to prevent disease and save lives. Today we have vaccines to prevent more than 20 deadly diseases, such as diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, influenza and measles. These vaccines help people of all ages in Northern Ireland to live longer, healthier lives.

Since vaccines were introduced in the UK, diseases like smallpox, polio and tetanus that used to kill or disable millions of people are either gone or seen very rarely. If people stop getting vaccinated infectious diseases could quickly spread again. This would be devastating.

Some infectious diseases can kill children or cause lasting damage to their health. Your child's immune system needs help to fight those diseases that may happen in the future and immunisation provides this support.

Young babies are very vulnerable to infections which is why they need to be protected as early as possible. By getting your child vaccinated you are helping protect those who aren't yet eligible for vaccination, such as tiny babies.

**Always seek credible information regarding your child or your own health by speaking to your pharmacy team, health visitor, school nurse or GP.**

## What can happen if I don't vaccinate my child?

Due to the high number of children receiving vaccinations in Northern Ireland over the past couple of decades, many serious childhood infectious diseases are rarely heard of.

In recent years, however, vaccination rates have seen a slight decrease. It is crucial vaccine uptake remains high in Northern Ireland to prevent many of these serious diseases returning from parts of the world where they still occur. If this happens, children living in Northern Ireland who are not vaccinated will be at risk of these infections and potentially life-changing complications, even death.

## What is a vaccine and how does it work?

Vaccines prevent disease. They work by training your body's immune system to make antibodies, which are proteins that help fight infection, just as it does naturally when it's exposed to a disease. If you are re-exposed to the disease in the future, your immune system 'remembers' the disease and quickly destroys it before you become unwell.

Most vaccines are given by an injection, but some are given orally (by mouth) or sprayed into the nose.

## Vaccine safety

All vaccines go through extensive trials and testing to make sure they will not harm you or your child. A vaccine can only be approved once it has been rigorously tested and is found to be safe.

Once a vaccine has been approved for use in the UK it will continue to be monitored for any possible side effects by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA). It is reassuring to know the safety standards of vaccines have to be higher than those for medication to treat illnesses and the UK has some of the highest safety standards in the world.

## Every hero needs a shield. Give your child theirs






Vaccination is like a protective shield. It is the safest and most effective way of protecting your child against serious diseases. Your child will need a number of different vaccines to be fully protected as they go from birth to teenage years.

The PHA strongly recommends babies and children are vaccinated according to the Routine Childhood Immunisation Schedule. The table overleaf shows your child will receive vaccination against a number of serious diseases.

The best way to ensure your child's vaccinations are up to date is by checking their Red Book or speaking to your health visitor. If you think your child has missed a vaccination, contact your GP practice to book an appointment as soon as you can to make sure they have maximum protection against disease. For more go to: [www.pha.site/checktheirredbook](http://www.pha.site/checktheirredbook)

## Vaccine facts

It is well known there is misleading information circulating about vaccines. When you are making the decision to receive a vaccine or to have your child vaccinated, it's important to know that vaccines:

-  Have **not** led to increases in autism, asthma, or other auto-immune disorders
-  Do **not** overload or weaken the immune system – it is safe to give children several vaccines at a time and this reduces the amount of injections they need
-  Do **not** cause allergies
-  Do **not** contain mercury
-  Do **not** contain ingredients which cause harm in such small amounts – you can speak to your doctor or pharmacist, however, if you have any concerns about ingredients such as egg protein or gelatine



Age immunisation is given	Diseases protected against	How vaccine is given
<b>Two months old</b>	Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (whooping cough), polio, haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib) and hepatitis B (6 in 1)	One injection
	Rotavirus	Orally
	Meningococcal group B disease	One injection
<b>Three months old</b>	Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, polio, haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib) and hepatitis B (6 in 1)	One injection
	Rotavirus	Orally
	Pneumococcal disease	One injection
<b>Four months old</b>	Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, polio, haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib) and hepatitis B (6 in 1)	One injection
	Meningococcal group B disease	One injection
<b>12 to 13 months</b>	Haemophilus influenza type b (Hib) and meningococcal group C	One injection
	Meningococcal group B disease	One injection
	Measles, mumps and rubella (MMR)	One injection
	Pneumococcal disease	One injection
<b>Annually from two years old</b>	Flu	Nasal spray or injection
<b>From three years and four months old</b>	Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis and polio	One injection
	Measles, mumps and rubella	One injection
<b>12 to 13 year olds</b>	Human papillomavirus (HPV)	One injection
<b>14 to 18 years old</b>	Diphtheria, tetanus and polio	One injection
	Meningitis (meningococcal groups A, C, W and Y)	One injection



## Don't forget teenagers

**Keep an eye out for information from the school nurse team. It is really important to return the consent form to school on time.**

As your child gets older they will need protection from additional infections, before the risk of exposure increases.

They will need protection from the human papillomavirus (HPV). It is a common virus with as much as half the world's population being infected at some time in their lives. There are over 100 types of HPV but 13 of these are known to cause a number of cancers (cervical, some mouth and throat cancers and some cancers of the anus and genitals).

If vaccination is given before being exposed to the virus, when a child is 12-13 years old, it offers the best protection. For more on the HPV vaccine go to:

[www.pha.site/hpv](http://www.pha.site/hpv)

Teenagers also need protection from meningococcal bacteria. When they are between 14 - 18 years a single dose of the MenACWY vaccine will help protect them from the most common meningococcal strains in Northern Ireland. They will receive a booster vaccine to extend their protection against tetanus, diphtheria and polio at the same time.

**Whatever their age, do not wait until you think your child may have been exposed to a serious illness to get them vaccinated. Make sure they receive all the recommended doses at the recommended time for best protection.**

