



What vaccines are recommended now my baby is **6 months?**

When your baby is six months old, one age-specific vaccine is recommended: the combined DTPa-Hib-IPV-HepB vaccine. This vaccine protects your baby from six diseases. It is also recommended that your baby gets an influenza vaccine before the influenza season. Influenza vaccines are free and can be given at the same time as age-specific vaccines.

How will the vaccines affect my baby?

The vaccines are given as needles, usually in your baby's leg. Needles hurt a bit and most babies cry for a few minutes afterwards. Your doctor or nurse will be as quick and gentle as they can.

There are some things you can do to help, too. Wrapping your baby firmly, cuddling them in an upright position, facing you, or breastfeeding during (or straight after) the needles are given reduce pain for babies.¹ If you'd prefer not to be in the room when your baby gets the needles, you can bring someone with you to do the cuddling. If you can't bring someone else, let your doctor or nurse know. They may be able to arrange someone to help.

Vaccines contain parts of germs that have been weakened so they can't make babies sick. They work by showing the baby's immune system what the germs look like before they catch them. After having a vaccine, if those germs get into the baby's body, the immune system will already know how to clear them away so they don't make the baby sick.

Vaccines can make some children feel a little unwell for a day or two. The most common reactions are redness, soreness or swelling where the needles went in, not wanting to eat very much, mild fever (temperature), grizzly or unsettled behaviour and sometimes vomiting or diarrhoea. Most of these symptoms last between 12 and 24 hours and then get better. Sometimes a small hard bump (nodule) develops in the spot where one or both of the needles went in, and this can take a few weeks to go away. Although these reactions can be unpleasant, they are a lot less serious than the diseases vaccinations protect babies from.

What can I do if my child gets one of these reactions?

If your baby feels hot, it can help to dress them in light (summer) clothes. You can also offer lots of extra breastfeeds or if your baby isn't breastfed, try offering small formula feeds more often through the day. If your baby has a sore, red spot where the needle went in, it can help to put a cool cloth on it. Medical research has found that cuddles really do

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make babies feel better. Using a baby sling makes it easier to get things done while cuddling a baby who doesn't want to be put down. Paracetamol (Panadol®, Dymadon®) can also help to ease a fever and relieve soreness. (Always follow the instructions on the packet.) You can remind your doctor or nurse to give you a leaflet to help you remember these things today. **If you are worried about your baby's reaction to a vaccination, you can get help from your doctor, or the nearest emergency department, or you can call Health Direct on 1800 022 222 at any time of the day or night.**

Do the vaccines work?

Vaccines almost always prevent babies and children from getting the diseases described below. Sometimes babies or children who have been vaccinated still catch one of the diseases but they usually get much milder symptoms and recover more quickly than children who haven't had the vaccine.

What are the diseases this vaccine protects my baby from?

The one age-specific vaccine recommended for your child at 6 months of age protects against six diseases: diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, Hib, polio, and hepatitis B. You may not have heard of them because they are less common than they were before vaccines were available in Australia but children can still get them, especially if they aren't vaccinated. An influenza vaccine is the best way to protect your child against influenza, sometimes called 'the flu'.

Are the diseases serious?

Diphtheria is a serious disease that can cause a membrane (or skin) to grow over a child's throat and stop them from breathing. Diphtheria is very rare in Australia now, but the vaccine is still used to protect children from catching diphtheria from people who have travelled to places where it is more common.²

Tetanus (sometimes called lockjaw) affects all the muscles in the body, including the ones used for breathing. The germ that causes it lives in the soil, which means children can get it through a cut, a burn, a bite or even a prick.²

Pertussis is usually called whooping cough. It spreads very easily from one person to another through the air when someone who has it coughs or sneezes. The germ that causes it irritates the airways causing coughing fits that can be very severe. Small babies can die from whooping cough.²

Hib (Haemophilus influenzae type b) causes a variety of serious illnesses, including swelling around the brain (meningitis), blood poisoning (sepsis), swelling in the throat and infection in the lungs (pneumonia). Babies can die from the diseases caused by Hib and those who survive often have brain damage. Hib spreads from person to person just like a common cold.²

Polio causes muscle paralysis in the limbs and can also affect the breathing muscles and the heart. It is rare in Australia but more common in countries nearby. Children catch polio when they put their hands or toys in their mouths after someone who has the disease (but may not be sick yet) has touched them.²

Hepatitis B is a liver infection that often doesn't even make children sick when they first get it. Even if there are no signs at first, hepatitis B can cause serious liver diseases, including liver cancer, later in life. It spreads from one person to another, usually without either of them even knowing they have it.²

Influenza is an illness caused by influenza viruses. Although some symptoms are similar, influenza is usually much worse and lasts longer than a cold. Even if your child is usually healthy, influenza can make them very unwell. It can lead to serious conditions like severe lung infection (pneumonia) or swelling of the brain (encephalitis). Babies and children under five years are more likely to get severe influenza and need treatment in hospital.²

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I've heard vaccines can have serious side effects. Is this true?

Serious side effects can happen but they are very rare. About one child out of every 3000 have febrile convulsions² (fits or seizures) in the days after a vaccination. This can happen when a child's temperature (fever) goes up suddenly. They stop happening when the child's temperature stops going up. Febrile convulsions happen more often when toddlers have an illness (like a cold) that give them a fever, than they do after vaccination. Those who have this reaction usually recover quickly without any long-term effects.²

About one in one million (1,000,000) children have a severe allergic reaction (called anaphylaxis) to one of the ingredients in one of the vaccines.² If this happens, it usually happens before you and your baby leave the clinic and the medical staff are trained to help children who have this reaction to recover quickly. Anaphylaxis is frightening but extremely rare.

Side effects that last more than a few hours or a few days are extremely rare and happen for less than one in one million (1,000,000) vaccinated children.² **If you are worried about your baby, you can get help from your doctor or the nearest emergency department or call Health Direct on 1800 022 222.**

Where can I get more information?

If you would like more information about childhood vaccination or the diseases they protect children from you can:

- go to the SKAI website, talkingaboutimmunisation.org.au
- or you can write your questions in the space below and ask your doctor or nurse when you see them.

What is next?

At 12 months, three age-specific vaccines are recommended to protect your child from measles, mumps, rubella and meningococcal disease. Your child will also have a vaccine to strengthen their immunity to pneumococcus.

If your child has had an influenza vaccine for the first time, they will need a second dose four weeks later to strengthen their immunity. The second year your child gets an influenza vaccine (and every year after that), they will only need one dose. It is recommended that your child gets an influenza vaccine every year before the influenza season.

What questions would you like answered before getting your child's needles?

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I have no questions

References

1. Taddio A, et al. Reducing pain during vaccine injections: clinical practice guideline. Canadian Medical Association Journal 2015;187:975-982.
2. Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI). Australian Immunisation Handbook, Australian Government Department of Health, Canberra, 2018, immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au

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