



What vaccines

are recommended now my child is

4 years?

Now your child is 4 years old, a combined DTPa-IPV vaccine is recommended. This vaccine strengthens children's immunity to 4 diseases (see next page). It is also recommended that your child gets an influenza vaccine every year before the influenza season. Influenza vaccines given as an injection in the arm are free for all children aged 6 months to under 5 years, and can be given at the same time as age-specific vaccines. From 2026, some Australian states will provide a nasal spray influenza vaccine for free for children. The specific age included in state programs varies by state.

How will the vaccines affect my child?

Needles hurt a bit and most children cry for a few minutes afterwards. There are some things you can do to help. You can bring an activity or toy to distract your child or encourage them to take deep breaths during the visit by blowing paper windmills or bubble mix. Comforting cuddles during vaccination or straight after are also known to help reduce pain.¹

Vaccines can make some children feel a little unwell for a few days. The most common reactions are redness, soreness and swelling where the needle went in, not wanting to eat very much, fever, headache, an achy feeling all over, or a slight swelling under their ears. Some children get a small hard bump (nodule) where the needles went in. These bumps don't usually hurt and go away by themselves after a few weeks.

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

If your child feels hot, it can help to dress them in light (summer) clothes and give them extra water to drink. If your child has a sore, red spot where the needle went in, it can help to put a cool cloth on it. Paracetamol (Panadol or Dymadon) can also help to ease a fever and relieve soreness. (Always follow the instructions on the packet.) Medical research has found that cuddles really do make children feel better. 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 child, you can get help from your doctor, or the nearest emergency department, or call Health Direct on 1800 022 222 at any time of the day or night.**

What are the diseases these vaccines protect my child from?

The combined DTPa/IPV vaccine protects against diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis and polio. These diseases are still common in nearby countries, and children can still get these diseases in Australia, 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

What vaccines are recommended now my child is 4 years old?

Tetanus is sometimes called lockjaw. It affects all the muscles, including the ones used for breathing. The germ that causes tetanus lives in the soil, which means children can get tetanus through a cut, a burn, a bite or a prick from a nail or a thorn.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

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

Influenza is an illness caused by influenza viruses. Although some of the symptoms are similar, influenza usually much worse and lasts longer than the common 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 brain infection (encephalitis). Babies and children under five years are more likely to get severe influenza and need treatment in hospital.²

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

Serious side effects can happen, but they are very, very rare. Fewer than one in one million (1,000,000) children have a serious allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to one of the ingredients in one of the vaccines.² If this happens, it usually happens before you and your child leave the clinic. Your doctor or nurse knows how to help children who have this reaction to recover very 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 child, 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 against you can:

- go to the SKAI website, skai.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?

If your child had an influenza vaccine for the first time, they will need a second dose four weeks later to strengthen their immunity to influenza. 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.

This information sheet was written by a group of researchers called the SKAI foundation team. It was developed by Nina Chad PhD and Julie Leask PhD from the University of Sydney, Margie Danchin PhD from the University of Melbourne, Tom Snelling PhD from the Telethon Kids Institute, and Kristine Macartney MD and Melina Georgousakis PhD from NCIRS. The project is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing.