Vaccines and Pregnancy:
Answers to Common Questions

It is normal to have questions about vaccines during pregnancy. This guide answers common questions and explains how vaccines can help protect you and your baby.

If you have any concerns, your doctor is a great person to talk to.

1. Why are vaccines important during pregnancy?

Vaccines during pregnancy help to protect you and your baby from serious illnesses. They also provide protection to your baby for the first few months of life while their immune system is still developing.

2. Which vaccines are recommended during pregnancy and why?[1]

Tdap vaccine: recommended during each pregnancy between weeks 27-36.[2] This helps protect your baby from whooping cough after birth. Whooping cough can be life threatening for infants and about 1 in 3 babies who get it are hospitalized.[3]

Flu vaccine: recommended during flu season at any point in pregnancy.[4] Catching the flu while pregnant increases the risk of serious complications like premature birth.[5]

RSV vaccine: recommended between weeks 32-36 during respiratory season (September 1 through March 1).[6] It protects your baby from getting very sick with respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). RSV is the most common cause of hospitalization in infants under 1 year old.[7]

COVID-19 vaccine: updated COVID-19 vaccines are recommended during pregnancy, after pregnancy, or while breastfeeding.[8] It is best to receive it as early as possible during pregnancy at any time of year.[9] COVID-19 infection during pregnancy can increase risk of complications for both you and your baby.

3. Are there any side effects that are specific to vaccines during pregnancy?

Most people have no side effects or only mild ones, like a sore arm or low fever. Pregnant people generally do not experience different side effects than others. Talk to your doctor if you have any concerns about side effects.

4. Are there vaccines that I should get before I become pregnant, or after I give birth?

Before pregnancy: your doctor may recommend some vaccinations before pregnancy, like MMR, if you did not receive them earlier in life. This helps prevent infections that can be passed to your baby.[10]

After pregnancy: some vaccines may be recommended after delivery to protect you and help pass protection to your baby through breastmilk, especially if you missed certain vaccines earlier.

5. Are vaccines during pregnancy safe for my baby?

Yes, medical research has shown that vaccines are safe and the benefits of vaccination during pregnancy outweigh risks. Recommended vaccines are carefully tested, approved by the FDA, and continuously monitored for safety. Vaccines like Tdap, flu, and RSV do not contain live viruses and have been safely used by millions of women without evidence of pregnancy complications or birth defects. Live virus vaccines, like MMR and chickenpox, are not given during pregnancy but can be given before or after.[11]

6. What do vaccines cost?

Recommended vaccines during pregnancy are covered at no cost by most insurance plans. You can call the phone number on the back of your insurance card to confirm coverage.

If you do not have health insurance, you may still be able to get coverage during your pregnancy. MassHealth offers free or low-cost health insurance that includes recommended vaccines.[12] Ask your doctor's office for help and learn more at mass.gov/masshealth or by calling 800-841-2900.



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Check out these resources for more information:

- acog.org/womens-health/faqs/vaccine-safety-during-pregnancy
- vaccinateyourfamily.org/pregnancy
- mass.gov/info-details/vaccines-and-pregnancy

Vaccines for Your Child:
Answers to Common Questions

As a parent or caregiver, you want to keep your children as healthy as possible. Vaccines help protect children from serious and sometimes life-threatening illness.

Below are common questions about childhood vaccines. Your child's doctor can also help you decide what's best for your child.

1. Why do vaccines start so early on in life?

Vaccines are given early to protect children when they are most vulnerable. Babies and young children are at higher risk for serious illness, so the childhood vaccine schedule is designed to protect them as soon as possible. These vaccines have been safely used for decades.

2. Why are there multiple doses needed for some vaccines?

Some vaccines require more than one dose to build strong, lasting protection. Others (like the flu vaccine) protect against viruses that change over time. Each dose helps keep your child protected when they need it most.

3. Are there any side effects I should look out for in my child?

Most side effects are mild and short-lived. Your child may have soreness where the shot was given, feel fussy, or have a low fever. These usually go away within a day or two. Talk to your child's doctor if you have concerns about side effects.

4. Is it okay to delay or skip certain vaccines if my child is healthy?

It is best to follow the doctor-recommended vaccine schedule, which is carefully designed and tested to protect children when they are most vulnerable and to provide the strongest, longest-lasting protection. Delaying or skipping vaccines can mean your child is unprotected for a longer time. This means they can still be exposed to illnesses that can be serious or even life-threatening.

5. Is there a link between vaccines and autism?

No, extensive research has shown that vaccines and their ingredients do not cause autism.[13]

6. What happens if I fall behind on my child's vaccines?

Talk to your child's doctor about a catch-up schedule to get back on track. Delaying vaccines can leave your child unprotected when they are most at risk.

7. Why does my newborn need a vaccine before leaving the hospital?

Newborns need the hepatitis B vaccine soon after birth because they could be unknowingly exposed to the virus during labor or shortly after coming home. People who are infected with hepatitis B as a baby have a 90% chance of developing serious, chronic liver conditions in their lifetime. Doctors strongly recommend all babies get the hep B vaccine, so talk with a doctor if you have questions about vaccinating your newborn.

8. What do vaccines for my child cost?

In Massachusetts, all children under 19 can receive free vaccines.

- No health insurance is needed.
- No social security number is required.
- You will not be asked for payment.[14]

If you do have health insurance, bring your insurance card to your child's appointment.

9. Where can my child get recommended vaccines?

Children can get recommended vaccines from:[15]

- A pediatrician, family physician or other health care provider
- A community health center
- Some local health departments or school-based clinics



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Check out these resources for more information:

- healthychildren.org/immunizationschedules
- vaccinateyourfamily.org
- mass.gov/topics/immunization

To learn more, visit MassMed.org/Vaccines