

Childhood immunisation

Your questions answered

Real questions from parents in South Devon



Don't
Hesitate –
Vaccinate !

Immunisation has been used to protect so many children that it is now the norm to see healthy children in our community. However, although immunisation keeps most diseases at bay, they still exist and are a threat to the health of your child.

The latest outbreak of measles in Devon was in 2011 and, contrary to popular belief, measles is not a mild disease. It is highly infectious and complications include chest infections, fits, swelling of the brain and brain damage.

These questions are from parents in South Devon. We hope the answers help with your questions and remind you to check that your child is up to date with their vaccinations. Remember – don't forget to top up your child's protection with the pre-school booster.

Q. For how long has vaccination been used?

A. Edward Jenner discovered vaccination in its modern form in 1796 and in the past 50 years it has saved more lives worldwide than any other medical product or procedure.

Q. How does vaccination work?

A. Vaccination works because your child's antibodies remember the disease and fight it. Only vaccination can do this. There is no other medical or homeopathic equivalent.

Q. What do vaccines contain?

A. The essential part of a vaccine is a substance called an "antigen". An antigen is a large molecule and different vaccines contain different antigens. Vaccines work by telling the body to make antibodies against a disease. Vaccines also contain preservatives, adjuvants and additives. There is

no evidence that any of these cause harm. The reason they are used is to ensure that the vaccine is as safe and effective as possible.

Q. Why vaccinate so young?

A. The role of a vaccine is to strengthen the immune system against disease. Vaccinations are given at the times when your child is most at risk of the severe complications of the diseases.

Q. Should I delay until my child appears more robust? Can combined vaccines overload my baby's immune system?

A. No. Delaying until your child appears more robust in weight and physical appearance can mean they are unprotected during their most vulnerable time. Your child is exposed to thousands of germs every day. The combined vaccines use less than 0.1% of the immune system and actually strengthen it to fight disease.

Q. What if my child is ill on the day of the appointment?

A. If your baby has a minor illness, without a fever, such as a cold they can have their vaccinations as normal.

Q. Can homeopathic treatment be used instead?

A. The British Homeopathic Association states that there is no evidence to show that homeopathic medicines can be used instead of conventional vaccination.

Q. What about single vaccines?

A. The NHS does not recommend the use of single vaccines and the single measles, mumps and rubella vaccines are not licensed for use in this country. This means that if you seek this route through private clinics, there is no guarantee as to whether the vaccine has been developed appropriately and if it actually works. Many

parents who have taken this route have also been unable to get hold of all three measles, mumps and rubella vaccines, leaving their child at risk of diseases which are circulating at the moment. Private clinics will also ask you to sign a disclaimer which the NHS will never do.

If you are considering opting for the single vaccines, it is recommended that you talk through your concerns with your practice nurse or health visitor. Combination vaccines are well tested and reduce the number of appointments required for your child reducing anxiety and providing protection earlier.

Q. Does my child need all of the boosters?

A. Protection against diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough and polio can fade over time. The pre-school booster, which is given when your child is around 3 years and 4 months old, will top up their protection against these diseases. This is particularly important when entering a new school community.

Q. What is the greatest – the risk of side effects or the risk of disease?

A. Infectious diseases pose a far greater risk to your child than the vaccines that protect against them. As with all medicines, there can be side effects. However, serious side effects are uncommon and permanent side effects are rare.

Further information

Personalised vaccinations planner available at: www.nhs.uk/planners/vaccinations

Vaccination checklist

Is your child protected?

Here's a checklist of the vaccines for children under five years of age that are routinely offered in the UK for free on the NHS, and the age at which you should ideally have them:

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2 months:

- Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (whooping cough), polio and Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib, a bacterial infection that can cause severe pneumonia or meningitis in young children) given as a 5-in-1 single vaccine known as DTaP/IPV/Hib
- Pneumococcal infection vaccine, first dose

3 months:

- 5-in-1, second dose (DTaP/IPV/Hib)
- Meningitis C

4 months:

- 5-in-1, third dose (DTaP/IPV/Hib)
- Pneumococcal infection, second dose
- Meningitis C, second dose

Between 12 and 13 months:

- Meningitis C, third dose
- Hib, fourth dose (Hib/MenC given as a single vaccine)
- MMR (measles, mumps and rubella), given as a single jab
- Pneumococcal infection, third dose

3 years and 4 months, or soon after:

- MMR, second vaccine
- Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis and polio (DTaP/IPV), given as a 4-in-1 pre-school booster

Your question not answered? – contact your practice nurse, health visitor or call Tracy Fabiano, Immunisation Co-ordinator, on 01392 267 667 or email: tracy.fabiano@nhs.net or text 07837 685347.

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