

A quick guide to  
**childhood  
immunisations**  
for the parents of  
**premature babies**



**'The two public health interventions that have had the greatest impact on the world's health are clean water and vaccines'** World Health Organization

### **What is immunisation and why is it needed?**

Immunisation is a way of protecting ourselves from serious diseases. There are some diseases that can kill children or cause lasting damage to their health. Immunisations are given to prepare your child's immune system (its natural defence system) to fight off those diseases when your child comes into contact with them.

### **When should my baby be immunised?**

It is important that your baby has their immunisations at the right age (see the back cover). This will help to keep the risk of your child catching a serious disease as low as possible. The risk of side effects from some vaccines may increase if you put them off.

### **My baby was born early. When should premature babies have their first immunisation?**

Premature babies may be at greater risk of infection. They should be immunised in line with the recommended schedule from two months after birth, no matter how premature they were.

### **What happens at the appointment?**

The doctor or nurse will explain the immunisation process to you, and answer any questions you have. The vaccine is injected into the muscle of the thigh. If your child was born very prematurely (before 26 weeks' gestation) then it will receive its first routine immunisation in hospital.

## Are there any reasons why my baby should not be immunised?

There are very few reasons why babies cannot be immunised. The vaccines should not be given to babies who have had:

- a confirmed anaphylactic reaction (severe allergic reaction) to a previous dose of the vaccine, or
- a confirmed anaphylactic reaction to neomycin, streptomycin, or polymyxin B (antibiotics used in vaccines).

There are no other medical reasons why these vaccines should definitely not be given.

If your child's immune system is 'suppressed' (because they are having treatment for a serious condition such as a transplant or cancer), the doctor or practice nurse should get advice from a child health specialist.

## Dealing with common side effects

There may be redness, soreness or tenderness where the injection is given and a few babies may develop a mild fever. Make sure you keep your child cool by:

- giving them plenty of cool drinks, and
- giving infant paracetamol liquid – check the dose with your doctor

## Do not give medicines that contain aspirin to children under 16.

If your child's face feels hot to the touch, or if your child becomes ill, trust your instincts and ask your doctor for advice. Or call NHS Direct on 0845 46 47.

For more information about side effects, see *A guide to immunisations up to 13 months of age*.

## Watch out for meningitis and septicaemia (blood poisoning)

Hib, MenC and pneumococcal vaccines protect against some forms of meningitis and septicaemia. However, as these diseases can be caused by other bacteria and viruses it is important to know the signs and symptoms of the diseases.

Early symptoms of meningitis include fever, being irritable and restless, vomiting and refusing food – symptoms that are also common with colds and flu. But a baby with meningitis or septicaemia can become seriously ill within hours.

Look out for **one or more** of the following symptoms.

- A high-pitched, moaning cry.
- Irritable when picked up.
- Drowsy, difficult to wake.
- Pale, blotchy skin or turning blue.
- Fever, with cold hands and feet.
- Red or purple spots that do not fade under pressure. (Do the glass test explained below.)

Press the side of a clear glass against the rash and see if the rash fades and loses colour. If it doesn't, contact your doctor immediately.



If your child becomes ill with **one or more** of the signs or symptoms described above, contact your doctor urgently.

If you are still worried after getting advice, trust your instincts and take your child to your nearest hospital with an emergency department .

## Further information

*A guide to immunisations up to 13 months of age* contains more detailed information about the routine childhood immunisation programme.

Ask your health visitor for a copy if you were not given one soon after the birth of your baby.

You can also visit: [www.nhs.uk/vaccinations](http://www.nhs.uk/vaccinations)



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*408189/A quick guide to childhood immunisations for the parents of premature babies* or contact DH Publications Orderline.

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# Routine childhood immunisation programme

When to immunise	Diseases protected against	Vaccine given
Two months old	Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (whooping cough), polio and <i>Haemophilus influenzae</i> type b (Hib) Pneumococcal infection	DTaP/IPV/Hib and Pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV)
Three months old	Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, polio and <i>Haemophilus influenzae</i> type b (Hib) Meningitis C (meningococcal group C)	DTaP/IPV/Hib and MenC
Four months old	Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, polio and <i>Haemophilus influenzae</i> type b (Hib) Meningitis C Pneumococcal infection	DTaP/IPV/Hib, MenC and PCV
Around 12 months	<i>Haemophilus influenzae</i> type b (Hib) and meningitis C	Hib/MenC
Around 13 months	Measles, mumps and rubella (German measles) Pneumococcal infection	MMR and PCV
Three years and four months or soon after	Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis and polio Measles, mumps and rubella	DTaP/IPV or dTaP/IPV and MMR
Girls aged 12 to 13 years	Cervical cancer caused by human papillomavirus types 16 and 18	HPV
13 to 18 years old	Tetanus, diphtheria and polio	Td/IPV

Stick this leaflet on your fridge to remind you when your baby's immunisations are due.