Frequently Asked Questions about Vaccines

Health and community partners have worked with local doctors to answer your common questions about vaccines

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What do vaccines do?

Each vaccine is different but all of them aim to provide your body with memory to protect you from future disease. This means that if you have had a vaccine, and then a dangerous bug infects you, your body defences can quickly get ready to attack the bug and get rid of it before any further serious harm occurs.

Professor David Katz, immunologist at UCL and Chair of the Jewish Medical Association

Why should I vaccinate my child?

Vaccines are the safest way to protect your child from diseases like diphtheria, polio, and measles. The short- and long-term effects of these diseases can be extremely serious and devastating.

Professor David Katz

Can a vaccine give someone the disease it's supposed to prevent?

Older vaccines (which were endorsed and encouraged by UK Rabbanim when they were introduced around 250 years ago) contained “milder” forms of the same bugs that cause infectious diseases. Today many vaccines are either killed bugs or “synthetic” – made so that they look exactly like part of the bug and thus will provide enough memory to know how to respond successfully to an infection. The newest vaccines – such as for COVID-19 – use a method that allows the body to make its own memory signal about the virus. All these more recent vaccines are designed deliberately so that they cannot cause infection.

Professor David Katz

Are the vaccines offered in England safe?

Yes, vaccines are safe. Billions of people have been safely vaccinated from key diseases around the world. All vaccines undergo extensive and rigorous multi-stage testing through clinical trials and are continually monitored for safety and effectiveness. In the UK the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) regulates medicines including vaccines to ensure the highest levels of safety.

Dr Blumberg, GP at Stamford Hill practice

What are the side effects of vaccines?

Many vaccinations have side-effects which are mild and short-lived. Having a sore arm from the injection, feeling tired, headaches, feeling achy and feeling sick are common side-effects. Remember this is a normal sign and means that your immune system is responding to the vaccination and creating long term memory, so that when you encounter the real infection, you will fight it very quickly. Also, it's important to remember that side-effects are much less troublesome than the risk of the disease itself, which can be very serious.

Dr Tehseen Khan, GP at Spring Hill Practice

Can I use homeopathic remedies to protect my children instead of vaccines?

There is no evidence that homeopathic remedies provide any protection against those illnesses for which children are immunised. The only way to guarantee protection is by having the vaccines recommended by your GP.

Dr Joseph Spitzer, GP at Cranwich Road Surgery

What should I do if my child does not react well to immunisations? Sometimes I struggle to get to speak with a health professional about this.

Most practices have a lead practice nurse or immunisation nurse, who can provide advice and answer questions about immunisations. You can get in touch with them by calling your general practice.

Explain your concerns clearly, so that your GP or health professional will be able to respond to whatever it is that concerns you about the vaccines and how they affect your child.

Dr Joseph Spitzer, GP at Cranwich Road Surgery

Should I have a flu vaccine even it makes me feel a bit unwell afterwards?

Like all medicines, the flu vaccine can cause side effects. They're usually mild and normally last only a day or two. It's normal to experience side effects after a vaccine. It shows the vaccine is teaching your body's immune system how to protect itself from the disease. But not everyone gets side effects. These potential side effects are much less serious than flu or complications associated with flu. Remember that flu can be very serious and can cause complications and death. This season, we're seeing more flu activity, so have your flu jab and protect yourself and others around you

Dr Tehseen Khan, GP at Spring Hill Practice

Why is it important to vaccinate babies in line with the vaccine schedule? I prefer to wait until my baby is a bit older.

The childhood immunisation schedule is designed to protect your child and provide immunity early in life before they are likely to be exposed to life-threatening diseases, ensuring your child is protected at exactly the right time. The schedule is based on how your child's immune system responds to vaccines at different ages, and the likelihood of your baby being exposed to a particular disease. Delaying vaccines could leave your child vulnerable to disease when they are most likely to have serious complications.

Catherine Sekwalor, Immunisation Lead Nurse at Springfield Park PCN

Who is at risk of catching infectious diseases like measles, polio, whooping cough or rubella?

Those children who are unimmunised for diseases such as measles, polio or rubella are most at risk of catching infectious diseases, especially if they have underlying health problems.
Whooping cough (pertussis) rates have increased in recent years and babies who are too young to start their vaccinations are at the greatest risk. Young babies with whooping cough are often very unwell and most will be admitted to the hospital because of their illness. When whooping cough is particularly severe, they can die. Babies can be protected antenatally, ideally from 16 weeks up to 32 weeks. If this vaccine was missed, it can still be taken prior to confinement.

Dr Tehseen Khan, GP at Spring Hill Practice

Where can my children receive their vaccinations?

Your child can get their routine or catch-up vaccinations at their GP practice. There are also vaccination clinics at Stamford Hill Group Practice, Spring Hill Practice and Lubavitch Children's Centre.

Catherine Sekwalor, Immunisation Lead Nurse at Springfield Park PCN

For questions or to book directly, contact the Lead Immunisations Nurse on: 07469 351 784

Is it safe for babies and children to have several vaccines at once?

Vaccinations are recommended early in childhood to protect against serious infectious diseases, it is important that your child has vaccinations at the time when they are most vulnerable to infections. Giving multiple vaccinations at the same time can be less traumatic for the child.
Having multiple vaccinations cannot overload your child's immune system. We are all exposed to millions of bacteria and viruses on a daily basis. Eating food introduces new bacteria into the body and a baby places his or her hands or other objects in his or her mouth hundreds of times every hour, exposing the immune system to more germs. As a result, having multiple vaccinations or combination vaccinations will not overload your child's immune system.

Dr Tehseen Khan, GP at Spring Hill Practice

I've heard that the flu vaccine contains gelatine from pigs, what do rabbis say about this?

I confirm that there are no kashrus problems with vaccines administered either orally or by injection or nasal spray even if they have a porcine element. I hope this information will be of assistance in reassuring the community and promoting uptake of vaccines.

Rabbi Adler, Kashrus and Medicines Information Service, Gateshead

Are the recommended vaccines safe antenatally?

Having the recommended vaccinations ante- and postnatally is one of the most effective things that you can do to reduce the risk of vaccine preventable infections for you and your baby.

Dr Ora Jesner, Consultant Obstetrician and Gynaecologist

Some vaccines are recommended and safe to have both antenatally, or when breastfeeding to ensure that mums and their babies are healthy and to protect them from getting a serious disease and passing it on to their new-born.

However, it does depend on the type of vaccination. Live vaccines are not usually advised antenatally, for example the MMR vaccine, and you will usually be advised to wait until after delivery to get vaccinated. Your midwife or doctor can advise which vaccines are best for you dependent on your circumstances.

Which vaccines should I get antenatally?

In the UK, there are three vaccines that are currently recommended:

Flu Vaccine

Your immune system (the body's natural defence) is weakened antenatally, which means you're less able to fight off infections.

This can raise the risk from flu – which is more likely to cause complications and hospital admissions. Flu in the mother is also a risk to her baby, but vaccination provides protection from these effects.

The Pertussis (Whooping Cough) Vaccine

Whooping cough is a very serious infection, and young babies are most at risk.

Almost all deaths from whooping cough occur in young babies before they have had a chance to be vaccinated.

Babies can be protected by antenatal vaccinations.

The whooping cough vaccine should be given from 16 weeks after conception and should be offered at every new conception.

COVID-19 Vaccines

COVID vaccination is the safest and most effective way for women to protect themselves and their babies against severe COVID-19 disease.

Antenatally, people are more at risk of becoming seriously ill from COVID-19 and are at an increased risk of complications such as premature babies and neonatal loss. The vaccines do not contain live corona-virus so cannot infect mothers or babies.

Midwives or doctors can advise which vaccines are best for you.

KEEP YOUR CHILD SAFE

Don't delay their vaccinations

Age	Vaccinations Due	Has your child been vaccinated?
2 months	• 6-in-1 (Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (whooping cough), polio, Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib) and hepatitis B) • Meningococcal B • Rotavirus	☐
3 months	• 6-in-1 (2nd dose) • Rotavirus (2nd dose) • Pneumococcal	☐
4 months	• 6-in-1 (3rd dose) • Meningococcal B (2nd dose)	☐
1 year	• Pneumococcal (2nd dose) • Meningococcal B (3rd dose) • Hib and Meningococcal C • MMR (Measles Mumps Rubella)	☐
2 years to 10 years	• Flu vaccine (every year)	☐
3 year 4 months	• 4-in-1 pre-school booster (Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis and polio) • MMR (2nd dose)	☐
14 years (school year 9)	• 3-in-1 teenage booster (tetanus, diphtheria and polio) • Meningococcal ACWY	☐