UK Health Security Agency

NHS

# Supporting vaccination for school age children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)



Practical information for parents and carers

immunisation
helping to protect everyone at every age



This leaflet is designed to help parents and carers understand the importance and benefits of vaccinations for children and young people with SEND. It seeks to address many of the queries and concerns raised by parents and carers of children with SEND and provides practical advice and information on how to prepare for an immunisation appointment, what to expect, and where to find accurate and reliable trusted sources of information on vaccinations.

Vaccines are the safest way to protect children and young people from serious diseases. They also help protect other people who cannot have certain vaccines, such as children with weakened immune systems.

Vaccines are thoroughly tested to make sure they are safe. It often takes many years for a vaccine to go through appropriate trials and tests it needs to pass for approval. Vaccines in the UK are carefully monitored for any rare side effects by the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA). Anyone can report a suspected side effect of vaccination to the MHRA through the Yellow Card Scheme. It's safe for children to have several vaccines at the same time.



Your child can have extra support and reasonable adjustments at their vaccination appointment if they require it. This might include having a quiet space for their vaccination, having more time, or their appointment scheduled at the beginning or end of a vaccination clinic or having a parent with them. If your child has any specific needs and reasonable adjustments that need taking in to account, then you can contact your GP practice or School Aged Immunisation Team beforehand to discuss this.

Most vaccinations are administered before children start school. You can familiarise yourself with the routine child immunisation schedule at Routine Childhood Immunisation Schedule. In addition, seasonal flu vaccines are offered each year. See this leaflet Protect your child against flu for more information.

The adolescent vaccinations are delivered by School Aged Immunisation Providers (see page 3 of this leaflet). Sometimes vaccines may be offered in an educational setting in response to an outbreak.

If your child is not up to date with their vaccines this means they are at risk of serious infections. Some vaccines can be caught up at school when the flu vaccine is given (e.g. MMR or MMRV) but other catch-up vaccines need to be arranged with your GP practice.



# Routine childhood immunisation programme from January 2026

Most routine vaccines are given as an injection in the thigh or upper arm, Rotavirus vaccine is given as drops to be swallowed.

| Age due | Vaccines that protect against | Vaccine given |
|---|---|---|
| Eight weeks old | Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (whooping cough), polio, Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib) and hepatitis B | DTaP/IPV/Hib/HepB (6 in 1 vaccine) |
| | Meningococcal group B (MenB) | MenB |
| | Rotavirus gastroenteritis | Rotavirus |
| Twelve weeks old | Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (whooping cough), polio, Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib) and hepatitis B | DTaP/IPV/Hib/HepB (6 in 1 vaccine) |
| | MenB | MenB |
| | Rotavirus | Rotavirus |
| Sixteen weeks old | Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (whooping cough), polio, Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib) and hepatitis B | DTaP/IPV/Hib/HepB (6 in 1 vaccine) |
| | Pneumococcal (13 serotypes) | PCV |
| One year old (on or after the child's first birthday) | Pneumococcal<br>Measles, mumps, rubella and chickenpox (varicella)<br>MenB | PCV<br>MMRV<br>MenB |
| Eighteen months old | DTaP/IPV/Hib/HepB<br>Measles, mumps, rubella, and chickenpox (varicella) | DTaP/IPV/Hib/HepB<br>MMRV |
| Three years four months old or soon after | Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis and polio | dTaP/IPV |
| Boys and girls aged twelve to thirteen years | Cancers and genital warts caused by specific human papillomavirus (HPV) types | HPV |
| Fourteen years old (school Year 9) | Tetanus, diphtheria and polio | Td/IPV |
| | Meningococcal groups A, C, W and Y | MenACWY |

# Vaccine suitability

## 1 Are vaccines safe for children with additional health needs or disabilities?

Yes. Vaccines are the safest way to help protect against serious illness. They are tested and constantly monitored. Most children can have all vaccines, and this is also true for children with SEND.

Reasons why someone may not be able to have a vaccine generally fall into two groups:

- severe allergic (anaphylactic) reactions: very rarely, a child may have a serious allergy to something in a vaccine. Information about vaccine ingredients is listed in the leaflet that comes with each vaccine. If your child has a serious allergy, speak to a healthcare professional before vaccination
- immunosuppression: some children have a weakened immune system. This can happen if they are having treatment for cancer or other conditions. In these cases, some vaccines may need to be delayed, or an alternative type given. If your child is in this situation, a specialist healthcare professional can advise what vaccines your child can have

## 2 My child has a weakened immune system – is vaccination still safe?

In general, children who are immunosuppressed (have a weakened immune system) should not receive live vaccines. This includes children who have conditions that affect their immune system, such as primary immunodeficiency, or those being treated for cancer or who have had a transplant. Primary immunodeficiencies are very rare diseases that mean you are more likely to catch infections. They are usually caused by a faulty gene and are diagnosed soon after birth.

If you think this applies to your child, you must tell your doctor, practice nurse or health visitor before the immunisation. They will need to get specialist advice on using live vaccines such as MMRV and Bacillus Calmette-Guérin vaccine (BCG).

## 3 My child has a long-term health condition. Who can I ask about which vaccines are appropriate?

Most children can have all vaccines. Should you have any specific queries or concerns, please discuss this with your School Aged Immunisation Team, your GP or practice nurse, paediatrician or your child's specialist clinical team for further advice and guidance.

## 4 Will medication or ongoing treatment affect vaccination?

Most medications do not affect vaccines. Some medicines, like those that affect the immune system, may alter the appropriate timing or type of vaccine your child should receive. Ask your child's GP or practice nurse, healthcare paediatrician or specialist clinical team.

## 5 Are there extra side effects or risks for children with SEND?

Most side effects are mild and short-lived, like a sore arm, mild fever, or headache. Serious side effects are very rare. Most children with SEND will not be at any increased risk of side effects. If you have any queries or concerns then please discuss this with your School Aged Immunisation Team.

## 6 Do vaccines interact with feeding tubes or mobility aids?

Vaccines are usually given in the arm and do not interfere with equipment. Tell the School Aged Immunisation Team about comfort needs and reasonable adjustments in advance.

## 7 Can my child be vaccinated if they are unwell?

It is generally advised to postpone vaccination if a child is feverish; mild symptoms usually don't prevent vaccination.



# Ingredients, allergy, and reactions

## 1 Do vaccines contain gelatine or egg?

Some vaccines contain gelatine from pigs, e.g., nasal flu, MMR and MMRV vaccines. Alternatives exist for religious or allergy reasons such as injectable flu vaccine, and alternative MMR and MMRV vaccines.

Most flu vaccines have very low egg protein and are safe. If your child has a severe egg allergy like anaphylaxis, they can have the flu vaccine as an injection instead of a nasal spray. If you have concerns about any vaccine ingredients, please speak to your GP or School Aged Immunisation Team for more information.

## 2 What if my child previously had a reaction to a vaccine?

Tell your GP or paediatrician and your school who can liaise with the School Age Immunisation Team. They will review and plan safe alternatives.

## 3 What if my child previously has experienced severe allergies or anaphylaxis?

For some children, some vaccines may need to be offered in a controlled environment in case of a severe allergic reaction. This should be discussed with your child's specialist team.

# General safety

## 1 Who recommends vaccines in the UK and checks they are properly tested?

In the UK, vaccines are carefully checked for safety before they are used. The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) makes sure vaccines are thoroughly tested and continues to monitor them once they are in use. The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) recommends which vaccines should be offered based on benefits, risks and population need. You can find more information on the MHRA, Vaccine Safety Factsheet and JCVI websites.

## 2 How do vaccines work?

There are many types of vaccines but they all work in a similar way. Vaccines are given to prepare your child's immune system to fight off diseases if they come into contact with them.

Vaccines contain a small amount of either a weakened form or a carefully chosen part of the germ (the virus or bacterium) that causes a disease. Vaccines work by causing the body's immune system to develop cells that are programmed to remember the infection.

If your child later comes into contact with the infection, these cells will recognise it and rapidly produce antibodies and other substances that fight off infection and help to protect them.

## 3 What types of vaccines are there?

Most vaccines are given as an injection, sometimes called a jab. The flu vaccine for children is often given as a nasal spray. For more information on different types of vaccines, see Vaccine Safety Patient Factsheet – GOV.UK.

## 4 Where can I read more about how vaccines are developed?

You can read about vaccine development on the Oxford Vaccine Group website: How vaccines are tested, licensed and monitored | Vaccine Knowledge Project. There is written information, a video, accessible text, and a comic book-style information leaflet.

## 5 Where can I read reliable information about the vaccines offered and the infections they protect against?

You can read about the vaccinations available on the NHS website: Vaccinations – NHS. The current routine child immunisation schedule can be viewed at: Routine Childhood Immunisation Schedule.



## Accessible vaccine information

- HPV: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hpv-vaccine-vaccination-guide-leaflet/easy-read-guide-to-the-hpv-vaccination-from-september-2023
- 3 in 1 teenage booster: www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-guide-to-the-3-in-1-teenage-booster-tdipv
- MenACWY: www.gov.uk/government/publications/menacwy-vaccine-information-for-young-people
- MMRV: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/easy-read-guide-to-the-mmr-vaccination
- Easy Read guide to the MMRV vaccination: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/easy-read-guide-to-the-mmrv-vaccination

Flu resources aimed at individuals with lower literacy levels, or those with learning disabilities:

- All about flu and vaccination – children www.gov.uk/government/publications/easy-read-childhood-nasal-flu-leaflet
- Protect yourself from flu: easy-read leaflet and Protect yourself from flu: Easy read poster: www.gov.uk/government/publications/flu-leaflet-for-people-with-learning-disability
- Flu vaccination films for people with a learning disability and autistic people and their family or carers
  - www.youtube.com/watch?v=OqGSm0jaF9A
  - www.youtube.com/watch?v=jJ9QdwUitFg

All parents, carers and children are eligible to use the https://find-public-health-resources.service.gov.uk/

It is a completely free service which provides leaflets and other resources about vaccinations. Please register on the website and then can order paper versions of the leaflets or download digital versions if helpful.

If you would prefer you can call 0300 123 1002 or email Public Health Resources publichealthresources@ukhsa.gov.uk. If you need help placing an order or finding a leaflet.



# Practicalities and access

## 1 How can I prepare my child for having a vaccination?

UNICEF has written tips on vaccine conversations with children: How to prepare your young child for getting a vaccine.

Vaccine guide for parents and carers ambitious about autism.

There are videos available about having vaccines: Dr Raj, Get Well Soon, 'How Do Injections Help You?

For videos on what to expect with the nasal flu vaccine see School Aged Immunisation Service Flu Heroes information hub from Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust.

For a pictorial story about having the nasal flu, or injections at school and for information about teenage boosters and the HPV vaccine see Resources to prepare your child for immunisations from Bradford District Care NHS Foundation Trust.

## 2 What are reasonable adjustments?

Reasonable adjustments are changes made to the usual format of the vaccination clinic that are designed to support a disabled child to be vaccinated. This includes flexible timings, longer slots, familiar staff or parents to accompany the child, quiet or low sensory spaces, allowing familiar objects or comfort items, ensuring communication is accessible and allowing extra processing time where needed.

If you think your child needs reasonable adjustments, let the School Aged Immunisation Team know in advance. For guidance see: NHS England > Reasonable adjustments with further suggestions and easy read versions available at: About reasonable adjustments.

## 3 How do I share my child's needs with those vaccinating?

Share any care plans, health passports or reasonable adjustments with your school and ask them to pass these on to the School Aged Immunisation Team. Ask your child's school to share the contact details of the School Aged Immunisation Team if this has not be included in the invitation letter in order to discuss your child's condition/s and any reasonable adjustments that may be needed. Where possible, include key details on the electronic consent form.

## 4 What if my child can't tolerate injections?

For flu, a nasal spray is standard for most children. Other vaccines are only available as injections at present. These needle phobia tips can help make the experience easier for children who are worried about needles. If your child is afraid of needles and has other additional needs, please inform the School Aged Immunisation Team before their appointment.

## 5 Can my child use numbing cream?

Numbing creams are not offered in school vaccination clinics. If your child requires this, it can be discussed with your GP, paediatrician, or specialist clinical team and vaccination would need to take place within that setting.

## 6 Can I attend the vaccination appointment with my child?

Yes, this can usually be accommodated – check with the school vaccination team and your child's school beforehand.

## 7 What strategies can help manage anxiety?

Discuss your child's needs with the School Aged Immunisation Team and your child's school beforehand to explore any individual tailored approaches that may be required to facilitate a successful vaccination appointment. Options to reduce anxiety may include:

- **good communication & being informed:** ensuring that the child or young person is clear about the vaccination process beforehand and that information provided is accessible and communicated in a way that they can understand
- **choice & control:** taking extra time to put the child or young person at ease, explaining each step and stage of the process, agreeing the arm where the vaccination will take place, agreeing a suitable environment and seating position, or order in the queue
- **desensitisation:** practice at home using social stories and role play
- **distraction:** use distractions like talking to them about things they enjoy, counting, bringing a favourite toy, book, music, or videos or tablet
- **environment:** access to a quiet space / low stimulus area before and after vaccination may help. It may be necessary to request a longer appointment
- **support person:** opportunity for a parent or trusted adult to be present
- **strategies:** breathing exercises, comfort items, desensitisation visits and confidence building



## 8 If I want an alternative to school-based vaccination or if my child does not attend school, or is education otherwise than in a school (EOTIS), what are my options?

In some cases, offer of a school-based vaccination is not possible or suitable, for example due to extended illness or serious health concerns, or if a child is home-schooled. In these situations, vaccination can be given at:

- alternative School Aged Immunisation community clinics – ask School Aged Immunisation Team for clinic appointments or alternative venues
- your GP surgery – contact your child's practice to arrange this



# Consent and communication

## 1 How does consent work for children with SEND?

Parents usually provide consent for children and young people aged under 16.

Older children who demonstrate they understand the benefits and risks may be able to give informed consent themselves. For older children who cannot consent due to mental capacity considerations, parental responsibility or legal deputy arrangements will apply. Please contact the School Aged Immunisation Team should you have any concerns or require a conversation about consent.



## Catch-up and timing

### 1 How do I check what vaccines my child has had?

Where vaccinations have been delivered in the UK, most vaccine information should be contained in your child's **Red Book** (Personal Child Health Record). There may also be information in your child's record on the NHS app. Alternatively, you can ask you GP or health visitor.




### 2 What if my child missed school or declined on the day?

Vaccination is never forced. If your child has not received a vaccine, you will often be sent a link by the School Aged Immunisation Team to book a catch-up vaccine in your local area. If your child has additional needs that require accommodating, contact the School Aged Immunisation Team to discuss this.

### 3 Can my child catch up on missed vaccines?

Catch-up is possible for most vaccines via your GP. It may however be possible to catch-up on MMR vaccine at school by contacting your School Aged Immunisation team when they are attending to administer flu vaccines in the autumn term.

Vaccines are carefully tested, closely monitored, and are the **safest way to protect children from serious illness.**

# Contacts

## Who should I speak to if I have other concerns or questions?

- contact your School Aged Immunisation Team or school nurse (booking, consent issues, reasonable adjustments, local clinics) – ask your school for local School Aged Immunisation Service (SAIS) contact details
- GP / Paediatrician / Specialist Clinical Team (clinical advice for long-term conditions and provision of vaccination in non-school settings)
- Health Visitor (younger children)

To get a digital version of this leaflet that you can use to find the resources listed please scan the QR code or visit https://qrco.de/vacsend

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