



## Vaccine Safety

### **IMMUNIZATION: ARE VACCINES SAFE?**

The United States currently has the safest, most effective vaccine supply in history. Years of testing are required by law before a vaccine can be licensed. Once in use, vaccines are continually monitored for safety and effectiveness. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) continually work to make already safe vaccines even safer.

Before vaccines are licensed, the FDA requires they be extensively tested to ensure safety. This process can take 10 years or longer. Once a vaccine is in use, CDC and FDA monitor its side effects through the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS) and the Vaccine Safety Data Link. Any hint of a problem with a vaccine prompts further investigations by CDC and FDA.

If researchers find that a vaccine may be causing a side effect, CDC and FDA will initiate actions appropriate to the nature of the problem. This may include the changing of vaccine labels or packaging, distributing safety alerts, inspecting manufacturers' facilities and records, withdrawing recommendations for the use of the vaccine, or revoking the vaccine's license.

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For more information about VAERS, visit [www.vaers.hhs.gov](http://www.vaers.hhs.gov) or call the toll-free VAERS information line at 1-800-822-7967.

### **IS IT SAFE TO VACCINATE MY CHILD?**

In the vast majority of cases, vaccines are effective and cause no side effects or only mild reactions such as fever or soreness at the injection site. Very rarely, people experience more serious side effects, like allergic reactions. Be sure to tell your healthcare provider if your child has health problems or known allergies to medications or food. Severe reactions to vaccines occur so rarely that the risk is usually difficult to calculate. In the rare event that a child is injured by a vaccine, he or she may be compensated through the National Vaccine Injury compensation Program (VICP). For more information about VICP, visit [www.hrsa.gov/osp/vicp](http://www.hrsa.gov/osp/vicp) or call 1-800- 338-2382.

Some people should not get certain vaccines or should wait to get them. For instance, children with weak immune systems, as occurs with cancer patients, often need to wait to be vaccinated. Similarly, if a person has had a severe allergic reaction to a vaccine, she or he should not receive another dose. However, a person with a mild, common illness, such as a cold with a low-grade fever, does not have to wait to be vaccinated. Ask your healthcare provider for more information.

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### **WHAT IF I DON'T VACCINATE MY CHILD? Be aware of the risks.**

Immunizations, like any medication, can cause side effects. However, a decision not to immunize a child also involves risk. It is a decision to put the child and others who come into contact with him or her at risk of contracting a disease that could be dangerous or deadly. Consider measles. One out of 17 children with measles gets pneumonia. For every 1,000 children who get the disease, one or two will die from it. Thanks to vaccines, we have few cases of measles in the U.S. today. However, the disease is extremely contagious, and each year dozens of cases are imported from abroad into the U.S., threatening the health of people who have not been vaccinated and those for whom the vaccine was not effective.

Unvaccinated children are also at risk from meningitis (swelling of the lining of the brain) caused by Hib (a severe bacterial infection), bloodstream infections caused by pneumococcus, deafness caused by mumps, and liver cancer caused by hepatitis B virus.

*For further information, contact the  
Oklahoma City-County Health Department  
(405) 425-4437*

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