

# FACTSHEET



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## Immunisation

### What is immunisation?

Immunisation is an effective and safe way to prevent children and adults from getting sick from an infectious disease.

Immunisation is done using vaccines, to give people immunity to an infectious disease. Vaccines, are given to children, often as injections, to fight future infections caused by certain viruses or bacteria. The vaccines contain inactive components or weakened versions of these viruses or bacteria, to provide immunity without causing disease.

In the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, diseases like pertussis (whooping cough), diphtheria and tetanus were among the most common killer diseases of children. At that time more children died from infectious diseases than from all other causes of child death today. Thanks to the introduction of vaccines against these and other diseases, the number of deaths due to these vaccine-preventable diseases has fallen dramatically.

### Why do we need immunisation?

Immunisation is one of the best ways to protect your health, and the health of your children and the community. If enough people in the community are immunised, the infection can no longer be spread from person to person and the disease can die out altogether. If immunisation rates go down however, children will again be at risk. This has happened in a

number of countries when immunisation rates go down.

Today, we have vaccines which protect children against many diseases including the following:

- Pertussis (Whooping cough)
- Diphtheria
- Tetanus
- Measles
- Rubella (German measles)
- Mumps
- *Haemophilus influenzae* type b (Hib)
- Hepatitis B
- Hepatitis A
- Poliomyelitis
- Influenza
- Varicella (Chickenpox)
- Pneumococcal disease (some types)
- Meningococcal disease (some types)
- Rotavirus
- Human papillomavirus (some types)

The current NSW immunisation schedule can be viewed on the NSW Health website.

<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/immunisation/Publications/nsw-immunisation-schedule.pdf>

## How does immunisation work?

Every time your child has an infection, cells of his/her immune system are stimulated and become active. They also produce some special proteins called antibodies to fight against that infection. The antibodies made are specific to that infection.

Immunisation mimics a natural infection, without giving the child the disease. The vaccine stimulates the body's immune system so that it becomes prepared to fight against that infection if it comes along. The immunity produced by vaccines can survive for a long time; sometimes even a lifetime. Vaccines that are recommended for the general population are highly effective.

These days, children are recommended to receive more vaccines than in the past. Some parents may be concerned that their baby or small child might not be able to cope with so many vaccines at one time.

In fact, several vaccines can safely and effectively be given at the same time. Humans are in contact with thousands of "antigens" (the part of a virus or bacteria) that stimulate the immune system every day. The small numbers of antigens in vaccines are very little compared with the number the body can react to at any one time. It is safe, and in fact recommended, that all due vaccines are given at the same visit. Giving all due vaccines at the same visit will also cause less trauma for your child and yourself than drawing them out over several visits.

### Where to go for immunisations

- Your local doctor (general practitioners – GPs).
- Your local council, hospital or community centre may have free immunisation clinics.
- Some vaccines are offered through vaccination programs conducted in schools.

## Side-effects of immunisation

Immunisation is very safe and effective. The huge benefits of immunisation far outweigh the very small risks. Like many useful substances (e.g. medicines, lotions and food) a vaccine can sometimes cause side-effects. These are usually minor, such as soreness at the injection site, mild fever or being a bit irritable. In very rare cases, a child may have an unknown sensitivity to a vaccine component and develop a more serious reaction.

If you have concerns about possible side-effects from vaccination, it is good to discuss them with the doctor or nurse who will give your child their vaccines. They will also advise you on ways to reduce side-effects. Having a cough or cold (with no or only mild fever) is not a reason to delay immunisation. In very rare cases, if your doctor thinks that it may not be wise for your child to have a particular vaccine in the GP surgery, The NSW Immunisation Specialist Service (NSWISS) at the SCHN are available to discuss and administer vaccines. There are special clinics held at both The Children's Hospital at Westmead and Sydney Children's Hospital, which can provide expert advice and give the vaccine under supervision if necessary. Contact these hospitals for further information about these clinics.

### **NSW Immunisation Specialist Service (NSWISS) At CHW**

**Drop-in clinic** (no appointment): 9845 0169.  
Located on level 1, The Children's Hospital,  
Westmead Monday to Friday

### **CHW Specialist Immunisation Clinic.**

Appointment only: 9382 1418. Outpatients  
Department, Level 0, The Children's Hospital,  
Westmead

### **SCH Specialist Immunisation Clinic**

Appointments: 9382 1470. Outpatients  
Department, Level 0, Sydney Children's Hospital,  
Randwick

### **Hunter New England Health region:**

Child and Family Health Nursing immunisation  
clinic locations and times available on the  
Kaleidoscope Website

[www.kaleidoscope.org.au/site/immunisation](http://www.kaleidoscope.org.au/site/immunisation)

## For further information:

### **NSW Immunisation Specialist Service (NSWISS)**

[www.nswiss.org.au](http://www.nswiss.org.au)

### **The National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance (NCIRS)**

[www.ncirs.edu.au](http://www.ncirs.edu.au)

### **NSW Health**

<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/immunisation/pages/default.aspx>

## Immunise Australia

[www.immunise.health.gov.au](http://www.immunise.health.gov.au) has additional information about the vaccines, their benefits and side-effects, as well as answers to frequently asked questions.

### Immunise Australia Information Line

1800 671 811

(8:30am – 5pm Eastern Standard Time)

### Remember:

- The benefits of immunisation far outweigh the risks.
- Side-effects from vaccines are generally mild.
- Local doctors (GPs), local councils, hospitals or community centres may provide immunisations. There are also several school-based vaccination programs in NSW.

Note: Information on each of the diseases listed in the immunisation schedule can be found in the SCHN factsheet titled 'Immunisation- Diseases on the NSW Immunisation Schedule.

<http://www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/parents-and-carers/fact-sheets>

Note: Additional vaccines may be recommended for children who have got some specific medical conditions – your doctor or NSWISS will advise accordingly.