New Parent Toolkit

voices for vaccines

credible vaccine information for families, from families

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CONGRATULATIONS!

BRINGING A NEW BABY HOME is such an exciting time! You've been busy picking out the safest car seat, setting up the perfect crib, and making healthy choices for your growing family.

ANOTHER IMPORTANT STEP?

Learning how to protect your little one from vaccine-preventable diseases.

WHY ARE VACCINES IMPORTANT?

YOU MIGHT NOT HAVE personal experience with diseases like measles or pertussis, and it can feel like these illnesses are a thing of the past. But the truth is, they still exist. Vaccines help keep our children and communities safe. In 2019, there were 1,282 cases of measles across 31 states—the highest number since 1992. In 2025, we are experiencing another outbreak. The vast majority of cases occur in people who aren't vaccinated.

When people skip vaccines, they not only put themselves at risk but also those around them—especially babies, young children, and the elderly. Outbreaks of serious illnesses, like ***Haemophilus influenzae*** type B (which can cause meningitis and even death in infants), measles, and pertussis have been linked to vaccine refusals.

It's understandable to wonder if vaccines are still necessary when these diseases are relatively rare. But the fact is, these diseases haven't gone away.

AS RECENT OUTBREAKS DEMONSTRATE, UNVACCINATED CHILDREN ARE AT GREAT RISK.

Vaccination is one of the most effective ways to keep your child safe from illnesses that can have lifelong consequences.

VACCINE HESITANCY CONTINUUM

VACCINE HESITANCY is not all-or-nothing.

Most people who feel hesitant are not completely opposed—they're often in a space of uncertainty. They may have accepted some vaccines and delayed others. What they're really doing is searching for answers. By understanding where someone is on this continuum, you can offer the support and information that's most useful for them.

HOW DO WE KNOW VACCINES ARE SAFE?

VACCINES go through years of testing before they're approved. They undergo large, extensive trials and strict FDA reviews to be licensed. In addition, vaccines are thoroughly reviewed by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices before being added to the immunization schedule. Once in use, vaccines are continuously monitored to ensure safety.

The Institute of Medicine (the health arm of the National Academies of Science) has thoroughly reviewed thousands of vaccine research studies and confirmed that childhood immunizations are safe and do not cause long-lasting side effects or chronic conditions. The vast majority of vaccinated babies have no side effects or only mild, temporary side effects like soreness or a slight fever.

Voices for vaccines
credible vaccine information for parents, from parents

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Check out our detailed vaccine safety and benefits information on our website: VoicesForVaccines.org/Vaccines.

A SHORT BUT SPECTACULAR HISTORY OF VACCINES

WE OFTEN THINK of vaccines as a modern invention, but immunization has been around for centuries!

As early as the 11th century, Chinese records mention a process called variolation to protect against smallpox.

By the 13th century, Egyptians were using variolation to protect people.

By the 17th century, West and North African communities were also using variolation to prevent illness.

In 1879, Louis Pasteur developed the first lab-produced vaccine for chicken cholera.

Edward Jenner's discovery in the late 1700s—that exposure to cowpox protected against smallpox—led to the smallpox vaccine, ultimately saving millions of lives.

GROSS BUT TRUE

Did you know that the earliest form of immunization—called variolation—involved using a smallpox scab from an infected person to help protect others?

Thankfully, medicine has come a long way since then! Today's vaccines are carefully developed to be much safer and more effective.

VACCINES HAVE TRANSFORMED THE WORLD

THANKS TO VACCINES we've achieved some incredible public health victories.

Smallpox was eradicated. Once a deadly disease that killed millions, smallpox was officially wiped out thanks to vaccination.

Fewer children die before their 5th birthday. A massive 2015 study of one million children from 62 countries found that fully vaccinating communities reduced deaths in children under 5 years of age by 24%.

Vaccines even prevent cancer! The HPV vaccine protects against viruses that cause cervical cancer and some throat, anal, and other cancers. The hepatitis B vaccine helps prevent liver cancer.

QUICK TIP

Some parents worry about the HPV vaccine because they associate it with sexual activity. But here's the key: the vaccine works best when given between ages 11–13, well before potential exposure. It's all about building strong protection early, just like other routine childhood vaccines.

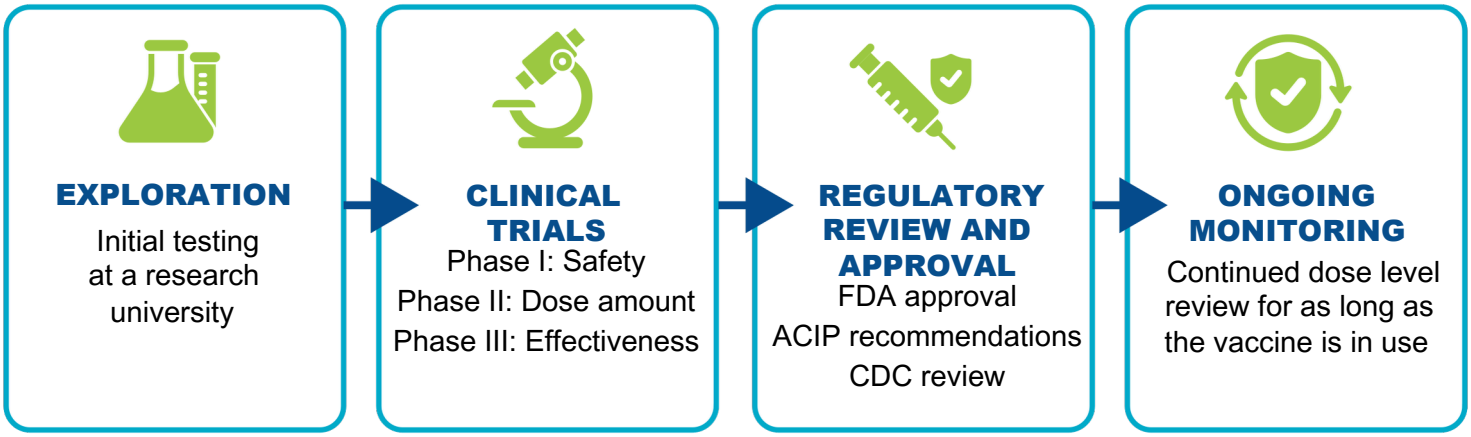
VACCINE DEVELOPMENT AND SAFETY: WHAT PARENTS NEED TO KNOW

IT'S COMPLETELY NATURAL to have questions about vaccine safety, especially when emergency vaccines come on the market.

Here's what you should know:

- **Vaccine development is a closely monitored, rigorous process.** Every vaccine, including accelerated emergency vaccines, must meet all safety and ethical protocols.
- **Vaccines are based on over a century of research.** Vaccine development is not "started from scratch." All vaccines are developed based on what we already know about safety, immunity, and disease prevention.
- **Side effects are well understood.** Almost all short-term effects (99.99%) appear within a few weeks. Most long-term side effects arise within 45 days of vaccination. Serious long-term effects are extremely rare.
- **Vaccines are the most researched and continually monitored medical interventions in history.** They undergo rigorous testing and monitoring before they reach your doctor's office.

STEPS IN VACCINE DEVELOPMENT



VACCINES WORK—HERE'S THE PROOF

ONE EXAMPLE? Measles, one of the most contagious diseases on the planet.

- Before the vaccine, **3 to 4 million people** in the United States got measles every year.
- Measles is so contagious that if one person with measles is in a room with 10 unvaccinated people, 9 of them will get sick.
- The measles vaccine drastically reduced risk of infection. When both doses are given, 97% of children will not get measles.
- The United States eliminated measles in 2000, but due to vaccine hesitancy, cases are rising again. Most cases are in people who are not vaccinated.

MEASLES IS NOT THE ONLY DISEASE WE ARE ABLE TO CONTROL WITH A VACCINE.

Vaccines also played a crucial role in controlling the 2014–15 West African Ebola outbreak and the COVID-19 pandemic. By August 2021, 203 million people in the world got COVID-19–but with vaccines on the scene and more people vaccinated, fewer are dying from COVID. These vaccines save countless lives worldwide.

VACCINE SAFETY

VACCINES ARE some of the most thoroughly researched medical advancements in the world. For over 100 years, scientists have been studying vaccines. In that time, billions of children have been safely protected from serious diseases.

Before a vaccine ever reaches your doctor's office or pharmacy, it goes through an extensive process to make sure it works safely. This process takes years and involves thousands of hours of scientific study. Here's how it works:

Clinical Trial Data

Thousands of people participate in clinical trials to thoroughly test a vaccine's safety and effectiveness. For example, Pfizer enrolled 43,661 people in its COVID-19 vaccine trial to gather a large amount of safety data.

FDA Review and Approval / Emergency Use Authorization

If a vaccine proves to be safe and effective during clinical trials, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) reviews it before it's approved for public use. The FDA only gives the green light if the benefits far outweigh any risks. Plus, dozens of regulatory agencies around the world conduct their own reviews to ensure safety and effectiveness.

ACIP Review and Guidance

After a vaccine is approved, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) carefully examines all the data and provides expert guidance on how it should be used to protect people best.

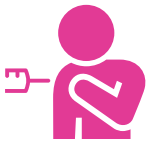
With this rigorous process in place, parents can feel confident that vaccines are one of the safest ways to protect their children's health.

KEEPING BABIES SAFE: VACCINES FOR MOM, BABY AND FAMILY

How can I protect my baby?

You can start protecting your baby from vaccine-preventable diseases even before they're born! One of the best ways to do this is by making sure that you, your family, and anyone who will be around your baby are up to date on their vaccinations.

Many adults don't realize they and their children need these vaccines:



Tdap (pertussis) booster for parents, grandparents, and caregivers

Annual flu shot for family members

COVID-19 vaccine for eligible adults and older children

WHEN THE PEOPLE CLOSEST TO YOUR BABY ARE PROTECTED,

it creates a cocoon of safety during those early months before your little one is old enough to get their own vaccines.

KEEPING BABIES SAFE: VACCINES FOR MOM, BABY AND FAMILY

Vaccines During Pregnancy

Expecting moms can also take an important step by getting vaccinated during pregnancy! Here's what's recommended:

1

TDAP VACCINE

Given between 27 and 36 weeks of pregnancy, during every pregnancy. This helps protect mom from pertussis and provides some immunity to your newborn. Pertussis is a serious and sometimes life-threatening disease that has been on the rise.

2

RSV VACCINE

Given between 32 and 36 weeks of pregnancy.

3

FLU AND COVID-19 VACCINES

Safe at any stage of pregnancy, these vaccines help protect both mom and baby. Even better, some of mom's antibodies transfer to the baby, giving them an extra layer of early protection.

TAKING THESE STEPS

helps ensure a healthy start for your baby—and peace of mind for you.

AFTER BIRTH: Make sure everyone around your baby is up-to-date on their vaccines. Follow the immunization schedule recommended by the CDC and supported by the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Following the recommended immunization schedule is the best way to protect your little one from preventable diseases.

BABY'S FIRST VACCINES: WHAT TO EXPECT AND WHY THEY MATTER

KEEPING YOUR BABY healthy starts with protection from serious illnesses, and vaccines play a key role. Here's a quick guide to the first vaccines your little one will receive—and how they help keep your child safe.

Hepatitis B vaccine

Your baby will receive the **Hepatitis B vaccine** before leaving the hospital. This protects against a virus that can cause serious liver disease, including cancer. Hepatitis B spreads through contact with blood and body fluids, and many people who get infected never know where they caught it.

Why it's important:

- Babies who contract Hepatitis B at birth have a **90% chance** of developing a lifelong infection.
- Of those, **1 in 4 will develop liver failure or liver cancer** later in life.
- The virus can spread through household contact, often among relatives.

MOST BABIES

don't have any reactions to the vaccine, but if they do, it's usually just a sore spot where the shot was given or a mild fever.

Rotavirus vaccine

Given at **2, 4, and 6 months**, the **Rotavirus vaccine** protects against a virus that causes severe diarrhea, vomiting, and fever—leading to dehydration in babies. Before this vaccine, up to 70,000 children were hospitalized each year in the United States due to rotavirus.

Why it's important:

- Rotavirus spreads easily, no matter how clean an environment is.
- The illness can cause serious dehydration, especially in infants.
- The vaccine is given orally (by mouth), not as a shot.

SIDE EFFECTS ARE NOTABLY LOW;

if they occur, they are mild and may include temporary diarrhea or fever.

DTaP vaccine (diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis)

Given at **2, 4, 6, and 12-18 months**, the DTaP vaccine protects against three dangerous diseases:

- **Diphtheria** – A bacterial infection that can block airways and lead to breathing problems.
- **Tetanus** – A painful condition that affects the muscles and nervous system.
- **Pertussis (Whooping Cough**) – A severe cough that can be life-threatening for babies. In the United States, it caused 8,000 infant deaths per year before vaccines.

WHILE DIPHTHERIA AND TETANUS

are now rare, pertussis outbreaks still happen, so keeping up with this vaccine is essential. Some babies may have mild reactions like fussiness, a slight fever, or soreness at the injection site.

Hib vaccine (Haemophilus influenzae type b)

Given at **2, 4, 6, and 12–15 months**, the **Hib vaccine** protects against a bacterial infection spread through coughing or contact with infected saliva. This infection can lead to severe illnesses, including:

- Meningitis (a life-threatening infection of brain's lining)
- Throat infections that can block breathing
- Blood infections

BEFORE THE VACCINE,

Hib meningitis was fatal in 5% of cases, and 10–30% of survivors had long-term brain damage. The vaccine helps prevent these serious complications, and side effects are usually minimal—just some soreness at the injection site.

PCV vaccine (pneumococcal conjugate vaccine)

Given at 2, 4, 6, and 12–15 months, the PCV vaccine protects against infections caused by the Streptococcus pneumoniae bacteria, which can lead to:

- **Ear infections** (5 million cases per year before the vaccine!)
- **Pneumonia**
- **Meningitis** (a dangerous infection of the brain's lining)
- **Blood infections**
- **Death**

BEFORE THIS VACCINE,

pneumococcal disease in the United States caused 13,000 blood infections, 700 cases of meningitis, and 200 deaths annually in children under five years of age. Vaccine side effects are usually mild, such as a little soreness or a low-grade fever; it is not associated with serious side effects.

IPV vaccine (inactivated polio vaccine)

Given at **2, 4, and 6–18 months**, the **IPV vaccine** protects against polio, a virus that can cause temporary or **permanent paralysis**.

Why it's important:

- While polio was eliminated from the United States in 1979, it still exists in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Nigeria. Polio is just a **plane ride away**—it only takes one case to spark an outbreak.
- The world is working toward total polio eradication, and vaccinating your child helps protect everyone.

THE POLIO VACCINE

has no serious side effects—some babies might have slight soreness at the injection site.

RSV preventive antibody or vaccine

These vaccines give your baby a strong, healthy start by preventing serious illnesses. If you have any questions or concerns, your pediatrician is always a great resource. Keeping up with your baby's vaccine schedule is one of the best ways to **protect them now and for the future**!

LEARN MORE: RESOURCES FOR PARENTS

LOOKING FOR trusted vaccine information? Explore these websites and books.

Websites:

- **Voices for Vaccines:** voicesforvaccines.org – You'll find comprehensive vaccine resources, a glossary of immunology terms, information about credible resources, fact sheets for every vaccine, podcasts, on-demand webinars, guidance to debunk misinformation, and more!
- Immunize.org: www.vaccineinformation.org
- Immunize for Good: www.immunizeforgood.com
- Vaccine Education Center: https://www.chop.edu/vaccine-education-center
- National Network for Immunization Information: www.immunizationinfo.org
- Vaccinate Your Family: https://vaccinateyourfamily.org
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov/vaccines
- American Academy of Pediatrics: www.aap.org/immunization
- History of Vaccines: www.historyofvaccines.org

LEARN MORE: RESOURCES FOR PARENTS

Books for parents:

- *Autism's False Prophets: Bad Science, Risky Medicine, and the Search for a Cure,* by Paul A. Offit, MD
- *Bad Faith: When Religious Belief Undermines Modern Medicine,* by Paul A. Offit, MD
- *Bad Science: Quacks, Hacks, and Big Pharma Flacks,* by Ben Goldacre
- *Bad Advice: Or Why Celebrities, Politicians, and Activists Aren't Your Best Source of Health Information,* by Paul A. Offit, MD
- *Deadly Choices. How the Anti-Vaccine Movement Threatens Us All,* by Paul A. Offit, MD
- *Do Vaccines Cause That?! A Guide for Evaluating Vaccine Safety Concerns,* by Martin G. Myers, MD, and Diego Pineda
- *Do You Believe in Magic? The Sense and Nonsense of Alternative Medicine,* by Paul A. Offit, MD
- *Immunity,* by William E. Paul, MD
- *On Immunity: An Inoculation,* by Eula Biss
- *The Panic Virus: A True Story of Medicine, Science, and Fear,* by Seth Mnookin
- *Panicology: Two Statisticians Explain What's Worth Worrying About (and What's Not),* by Hugh Aldersey-Williams and Simon Briscoe
- *Polio and Me,* by Ken Dalton
- *Pox. An American History,* by Michael Willrich
- *Tabloid Medicine: How the Internet is Being Used to Hijack Medical Science for Fear and Profit,* by Robert Goldberg, PhD
- *Your Baby's Best Shot. Why Vaccines Are Safe and Save Lives,* by Stacey Mintzer Herlihy and E. Allison Hagood
- *The Great Influenza: The Story of the Deadliest Pandemic in History,* by John M Barry
- *Viruses, Plagues, and History: Past, Present and Future,* by Michael B. A. Oldstone, MD

Vaccines are one of the most powerful ways to protect your child's health. If you ever have concerns, talk to your pediatrician—they're here to help. You've got this, and we're here to support you every step of the way!

www.VoicesForVaccines.org