



[What are immunizations and how do they work?](#)

Immunizations, also called vaccines or vaccinations, are medications that help develop immunity by imitating an infection, but this "imitation" infection does not cause illness. It does, however, cause the immune system to develop the same response as it does to a real infection so the body can recognize and fight the vaccine-preventable disease in the future. Sometimes, after getting a vaccine, the imitation infection can cause minor symptoms, such as fever. Such minor symptoms are normal and should be expected as the body builds immunity.

[Why should my child get immunized?](#)

Vaccines:

- Help prevent you or your child from getting dangerous diseases for which there are often no medical treatments.
- Help keep disease from spreading.
- Help protect people with [weak immune systems](#), who may not be able to get vaccines. Their only protection is for others to get vaccinated so illnesses are less common.
- Cost less than getting treated for the diseases.
- Have very few serious side effects.
- Often are needed before a child can attend school or day care.
- Prevent days out of work or school due to illness or caring for a sick person.

Vaccines are the best way we have to prevent infectious diseases. A successful vaccine program depends on everyone getting vaccinated.

[Haven't we gotten rid of most diseases that children are immunized against?](#)

Vaccinations in the United States have led to a sharp drop in diseases. Better living conditions have also helped, but they aren't enough to protect you from disease. Remember that a vaccine gives your child protection from the disease. A vaccine does not get rid of the disease. The disease still exists, and if fewer children get immunized for a disease, the disease could come back. And some diseases no longer found in the U.S., such as [polio](#), still exist in other countries. People who travel or move to the U.S. can bring these diseases into the country. So it's still very important to have your child immunized.

[Do my children need the flu vaccine?](#)

Influenza ("the flu") is more dangerous than the common cold for children. Each year, many children get sick with seasonal influenza; some of those illnesses result in death. **The single best way to protect your children from the flu is to get them vaccinated each year.** The seasonal flu vaccine protects against the influenza viruses that research indicates will be most common during the upcoming season.

[What are vaccine side effects/risks?](#)

The side effects associated with getting vaccines are almost always minor (such as redness and swelling where the shot was given) and go away within a few days. If your child experiences a reaction at the injection site, you can use a cool, wet cloth to reduce redness, soreness, and swelling. Serious side effects following vaccination, such as severe allergic reaction, are very rare and doctors and clinic staff are trained to deal with them. Pay extra attention to your child for a few days after vaccination. If you see something that concerns you, call your child's doctor.

[What is herd immunity?](#)

Herd immunity, also known as community immunity, refers to the protection offered to everyone in a community by high vaccination rates. With enough people immunized against a given disease, it's difficult for the disease to gain a foothold in the community. This offers some protection to those who are unable to receive vaccinations—including newborns and individuals with chronic illnesses—by reducing the likelihood of an outbreak that could expose them to the disease.

It is important for parents to know that since the January 2015 implementation of a reform designed to better inform parents on the safety and importance of vaccinations, Michigan's immunization waiver rates have steadily decreased. In just the first year following the reform, there were 7,657 fewer waivers in school and 1,720 fewer waivers in childcare. Overall, that represents a 35.4% decrease in Michigan's waiver rate and is an important step in helping Michigan's children stay healthy!

[Can I follow an immunization schedule that differs from the official schedule recommended for children in the United States?](#)

The schedule recommended by experts is designed to work best with a child's immune system at certain ages and at certain times. The schedule is set up so that your child gets the best protection possible at the earliest age possible from the fewest shots possible. Experts review the schedules every year based on the best research available and change the schedules as needed. A different schedule may not provide protection for your child. If shots are spread out or skipped, a child may get the disease during the delay.

[What is Michigan's educational requirement for parents wanting to opt their children out of vaccines for school?](#)

In response to Michigan's high nonmedical immunization waiver rate – one of the highest in the country – the Joint Committee on Administrative Rules approved a new educational requirement (effective January, 2015) for Michigan parents interested in opting their children out of vaccines required for school entry.

Any parent/guardian seeking to obtain a nonmedical immunization waiver for their child who is enrolled in school or a licensed child-care program is required to participate in an immunization-focused discussion with county health department staff. During the discussion, staff will present evidence-based information regarding the risks of vaccine-preventable diseases and the benefits/risks of vaccination, and also address immunization-related questions and concerns raised by parents/guardians.

This new rule preserves the ability of parents/guardians to obtain a nonmedical waiver following completion of the required educational session, and requires the use of the State of Michigan nonmedical waiver form.

Good news for our children, families, and communities: **In the first year following this new educational requirement, there was a 35% decrease in overall immunization waiver rates in Michigan!**

[How can school nurses help my family with immunizations and other health concerns?](#)

Immunizations are one of the top 10 public health accomplishments in our country! School nurses can answer questions about immunizations, preventable diseases, and help you find a health care provider. In fact, evidence supports that in schools where school nurses are present, immunization rates improve, student health records are more accurate, and student health needs are managed more efficiently (Baisch, Lundeen, & Murphy, 2011).

[Where can I find additional reliable information about vaccines?](#)

Ask your school nurse or visit <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents/resources/index.html>

References

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