

# Are Vaccines Safe?

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**Children's**<sup>SM</sup>  
Healthcare of Atlanta

- **Are vaccines safe for my child?**

Not only are vaccines safe for children, they protect against potentially life-threatening diseases.

Each time your child gets a vaccine (shot) your doctor will give you a Vaccine Information Statement (VIS). A VIS explains why the vaccine is important, who should and should not get the vaccine and what risks are involved with getting the vaccine.

In addition, the VIS lists side effects that can happen to your child when he gets the vaccine. Reactions or side effects are mostly minor—such as a sore arm, rash or mild fever—and can be treated with acetaminophen or ibuprofen. The choice not to vaccinate your child can be far more dangerous than the potential side effects.

Always talk to your child's doctor if you have questions before or after his shots.

- **What can happen if my child is not vaccinated?**

When people are not vaccinated, disease outbreaks can occur. Many people can get sick. Diseases prevented in the U.S. because of vaccines (polio, measles, whooping cough) are still common in other countries. Because a lot of people travel to and from the U.S., outbreaks of some of these diseases still occur in the U.S.

Even in Georgia, diseases such as whooping cough, measles and hepatitis B are seen each year. If your child is not vaccinated, he can be exposed to serious diseases.

- **How serious are vaccine-preventable diseases?**

These diseases are very serious. They can spread easily among households, schools and public places. Not only can your child get sick, but so can other members of your family.

Because of the positive impact of vaccines, most people have not seen what these diseases can do to children and families. When these diseases strike, they can be severe. For example, measles in children can cause blindness, deafness, swelling of the brain and potentially death.

It seems like a lot of shots at once. Should I spread out my child's vaccines?

In order to protect your child from diseases as early as possible, follow the recommended immunization schedule.

Combined shots mean fewer doctor visits, fewer needle sticks and less trauma for your child. When you schedule your child's vaccinations one visit at a time, you put your child at risk of getting shots late. The chance that you will miss or forget an appointment increases when you are scheduled for multiple doctor appointments rather than a single appointment.

Some vaccines are given as a series of shots. For example, polio shots are recommended for your baby at 2 months, 4 months and 6 months of age. Make sure your child receives all of the

shots in the series to ensure his protection. When there is more than one shot in a series, it is because research has shown more than one shot is needed to fully protect your child against that disease over a long period of time.

**Visit [www.choa.org/vaccines](http://www.choa.org/vaccines) for more details about vaccines, when your child should receive them and the diseases they prevent.**

- **Can multiple vaccines overwhelm my child's immune system?**

No. Vaccines strengthen your child's immune system. Studies show children who get the recommended shots during the first three months of life have fewer infections than children who do not get their shots.

The human body can handle everyday germs as well as the antigens from vaccines. When an antigen, or any foreign substance, enters the body, the immune system responds. This means a vaccine (shot) boosts the immune system's response to a disease, which protects the body from that disease.

When your infant puts his hands in his mouth, he is exposed to more germs than the antigens that are found in vaccines. In fact, there are fewer antigens in all of today's vaccines combined than in a single smallpox vaccine from 1900.

- **Should I be concerned about thimerosal in vaccines and its rumored link to autism?**

Recent studies have shown there is no link between the two. Thimerosal was taken out of vaccines starting in 2001. According to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), all vaccines for children age 6 and younger, except some flu vaccines, contain no thimerosal or only trace amounts. Many healthcare providers have a flu vaccine that contains no thimerosal preservative.

While the use of thimerosal in vaccines has dropped, the rates for autism continue to go up.

Visit [www.fda.gov/cber/vaccine/thimfaq.htm](http://www.fda.gov/cber/vaccine/thimfaq.htm) for information about thimerosal and vaccines.

- **Is it true that the vaccine for measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) can cause autism?**

Because signs of autism may appear around the same time children get their MMR shots, some parents worry the vaccine causes autism. However, studies have found no relationship between the vaccine and autism.

**Visit [www.immunize.org/autism/](http://www.immunize.org/autism/) for more details about vaccines and autism.**

**About Tips Provider:**

Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, a not-for-profit organization, is dedicated to making kids better today and healthier tomorrow. Our specialized care helps children get better faster and live healthier lives. Managing more than 850,000 patient visits annually at three hospitals and 24 neighborhood locations, Children's is the largest healthcare provider for children in Georgia and one of the largest pediatric clinical care providers in the country. Children's offers access to more than 60 pediatric specialties and programs and is ranked among the top children's hospitals in the country by U.S. News & World Report. With generous philanthropic and volunteer support, Children's has impacted the lives of children in Georgia, the United States and throughout the world. Visit [www.choa.org](http://www.choa.org) for more information.