

What If You Don't Vaccinate Your Child?

Your child is at risk for developing a vaccine-preventable disease

Vaccines were developed to protect people from dangerous and often fatal diseases. These diseases remain a threat. Vaccines are safe and effective protection.

Influenza or “flu” is a serious respiratory disease that can be deadly. Healthy babies and toddlers are especially vulnerable to complications from influenza. Every year children in the United States die from influenza.

Pertussis or “whooping cough” is an extremely dangerous disease for babies. It is not easily treated and can result in permanent brain damage or death. Whooping cough is most dangerous in children younger than one year. Many infants with whooping cough have to be hospitalized and each year some babies die. In 2019, over 15,000 cases of whooping cough were reported to public health officials in the United States. It is hard to protect unvaccinated babies from whooping cough because it is very contagious and often not recognized in adults and older children who may only have a mild cough with no fever.

Measles is a highly contagious disease that can lead to serious complications, including death. It remains common in many countries and has been brought into the United States by returning vacationers and foreign visitors. Vaccination caused measles to decline rapidly during the 1990s. Recently, vaccine hesitancy among parents in the United States and abroad has led to a growing number of children and teens who are not vaccinated and are unprotected from measles. This has led to outbreaks of measles in the United States, Canada, and other countries.

Chickenpox is very contagious. Before the development of a vaccine, chickenpox killed approximately 100 people every year in the United States. Most were previously healthy. Children infected with chickenpox must be kept out of day care or school for a week or more so they don't spread the disease to others.

Your child can infect others in the community

Children who are not vaccinated can transmit vaccine-preventable diseases at schools and in the community.

- Unvaccinated children can infect babies who are too young to be fully immunized.
- Unvaccinated children can infect people of any age who can't be immunized for medical reasons. This includes children and adults with leukemia and other cancers, immune system problems, and people of all ages receiving treatments or medications that weaken their immune systems.

Your child may have to be excluded from school or child care

During disease outbreaks, unvaccinated children may be excluded from school or child care to protect them and others. This can cause hardship for the child and parent.

Next steps...

We strongly encourage you to vaccinate your child. Please discuss any concerns you have with a trusted healthcare provider or call the immunization coordinator at your local or state health department. Your vaccination decision affects not only the health of your child, but also your family, your child's friends, their families, and your community.

► For more information about vaccines, visit these websites:

American Academy of Pediatrics

www.healthychildren.org/english/safety-prevention/immunizations

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents

Vaccinate Your Family

www.vaccinateyourfamily.org

Immunization Action Coalition

www.immunize.org and www.vaccineinformation.org

Vaccine Education Center at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia

www.chop.edu/centers-programs/vaccine-education-center