South East London Integrated Care System

NHS South East London

Protecting children's health now and for the future

More information about vaccines

selondonics.org/childrenshealth

nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations

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Why do children need vaccinations?

Vaccinations protect children from serious illness and potentially deadly diseases when they are very young, through their school years, and as adults. Across the world, vaccines have saved millions of lives. However, if people stop having vaccines, it is possible for infectious diseases to quickly spread again.

How do vaccines work?

Vaccines work by imitating an infection (the invasion and growth of a germ, like a virus or bacteria, in the body) and teaching the body to create special fighters called antibodies that protect it from disease.

It's much safer for the body to learn this through vaccination than by catching the disease and treating it. Once the body learns how to fight a disease through vaccination, it can often protect your child for many years.

Keeping children safe from disease and illness

According to the World Health Organization (www.who.int) vaccinations prevent more than 3.5 million deaths every year from diseases like diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, flu and measles.

Since vaccines were introduced in the UK, diseases like smallpox and tetanus, which used to kill or disable millions of people, have now disappeared or are seen very rarely. Other diseases like measles and diphtheria have been reduced by up to 99.9% since their vaccines were introduced.

However, if people stop having vaccines, it is possible for infectious diseases to quickly spread again.

What is this leaflet about?

This leaflet explains more about vaccinations (also known as immunisations) offered to children free of charge on the NHS and when to have them. It's important that vaccines are given on time for the best protection, but if your child has missed a vaccine, you can contact your GP to catch up.

Polio and MMR catch-up vaccinations in London

Children aged 1 to 11 in London who are not up to date with their routine vaccinations are being offered polio and MMR vaccinations through GP surgeries, primary schools, and community clinics.

Why are vaccines to protect children against MMR and polio particularly important?

In 2022, polio virus was found in sewage samples in London, suggesting that the virus has been spreading between people. While recent surveillance suggests that transmission has reduced, those who have not been fully vaccinated, or those who do not respond well to vaccines, could still be at risk of catching polio.

There has also been a rise in measles cases in London this year (2023). Across England, on average 1 in 10 children are not up to date with their MMR vaccinations, with some areas of London as low as 2 in 5, putting thousands of children at risk of catching measles, particularly those that are more vulnerable, and the disease spreading in unvaccinated communities.

Are the MMR and polio vaccines safe?

Yes, they are very safe and have protected millions of children worldwide.

Is there a link between the MMR vaccine and autism?

There is no evidence of any link between the MMR vaccine and autism. Many studies have investigated this.

How are the vaccines given to children?

Both vaccines are given through an injection into the muscle of the thigh or upper arm.

At what age does my child need their routine vaccinations?

Age	Vaccine	Protects against
8 Weeks	6 in 1 Vaccine (1st dose)	Diphtheria, Hepatitis B, Hib (Haemophilus Influenzae Type B), Polio, Tetanus, Whooping Cough (pertussis)
	Rotavirus Vaccine (1st dose)	Rotavirus
	MenB (1st dose)	Meningococcal Group B bacteria
12 Weeks	6 in 1 Vaccine (2nd dose)	(See above)
	Rotavirus Vaccine (2nd dose)	Rotavirus
	Pneumococcal (PCV) Vaccine	Streptococcus Pneumoniae
16 Weeks	6 in 1 Vaccine (3rd dose)	(See above)
	MenB (2nd dose)	(See above)
1 Year	Hib/MenC	Hib (Haemophilus Influenzae Type B), Meningitis C.
	MMR (1st dose)	Measles, Mumps, Rubella
	Pneumococcal (PCV) (2nd dose)	Streptococcus Pneumoniae
	MenB (3rd dose)	(See above)
18 Months	MMR (2nd dose) for children living in most South East London Boroughs	Measles, Mumps, Rubella
2-16 Years	Flu Vaccine (every year)	Flu (Influenza)
3 Years & 4 Months	4 in 1 (Pre-School Booster)	Diphtheria, Tetanus, Whooping Cough, Polio
12-13 Years	HPV Vaccine	Human Papillomavirus
14 Years	3 in 1 (Teenage Booster)	Tetanus, Diphtheria, Polio
	MenACWY	Meningitis, Septicaemia

What diseases do these vaccines protect my child against?

MMR
(Measles, Mumps, Rubella)

Measles and rubella usually start with cold-like symptoms, followed by a rash. In rare cases measles can lead to fits, blindness, pneumonia and meningitis, and can sometimes be fatal. Rubella is more dangerous to those in pregnancy, causing problems for the unborn baby. Mumps causes painful swelling in the side of the face and in rare cases can lead to viral meningitis.

MenB + MenACWY

Meningococcal infections can be very serious, causing meningitis and blood poisoning (sepsis). In rare cases they can be fatal.

Pneumococcal

Pneumococcal infections can beserious and lead to pneumonia, sepsis and meningitis.

Tetanus

Meningococcal infections can be very serious, causing meningitis and blood poisoning (sepsis). In rare cases they can be fatal.

Whooping cough
(also called pertussis)

Whooping cough is an infection of the lungs and airways and can make babies and young children very ill. In rare cases it can be fatal.

Rotavirus

Rotavirus is a highly infectious stomach bug that typically affects babies and young children, causing diarrhoea and vomiting, tummy ache and a high temperature.

Polio

Polio can cause mild, flu-like symptoms but in rare cases can lead to muscle weakness (paralysis).

Diphtheria

Diphtheria is a serious infection that affects the nose and throat and sometimes the skin. It can be fatal, especially in children, if not treated quickly.

Hep B

Hepatitis B is a liver infection that usually lasts 1 to 3 months. Most people either have no symptoms or mild symptoms but in rare cases it can become chronic and last over 6 months. Chronic Hep B can be serious if not treated.

Hib B

Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib) is a type of bacteria that can cause life-threatening infections. Babies and children are most at risk of getting seriously ill.

Flu

Flu can be a very unpleasant illness for children that can lead to serious problems affecting the lungs and airways, such as bronchitis and pneumonia.

HPV

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is the name given to a very common group of viruses, some of which are called “high risk” because they’re linked to the development of cancers, such as cervical cancer, anal cancer, genital cancers, and cancers of the head and neck. Other types can cause conditions like warts or verrucas.

What are the side effects of vaccinations for children?

Fewer than 10% of children experience mild side effects that last 2 or 3 days after vaccination.

Side effects may include:

- **Swelling, redness and feeling sore around the injection site**
- **Feeling a bit unwell or developing a high temperature**
- **Feeling upset, increased crying or irritability, restlessness**
- **Vomiting and temporary loss of appetite**

Some children may experience rarer side effects - for example a rash is experienced in 1 in every 24,000 doses of the MMR vaccine given. Speak with your GP to find out more about rarer side effects.
It's important to remember that the possible complications of infectious diseases, such as measles, mumps and rubella, are much more serious.

What should I do if my child experiences these or other side effects?

Mild side effects can be treated with paracetamol for children e.g. Calpol. If you're worried, or your child has any ongoing side effects, speak to your GP.

What is in vaccines and are they safe?

What do vaccines contain?

The main ingredient of any vaccine is a small amount of killed, weakened, or manufactured version of the disease-causing germ. These are called antigens. Some newer vaccines contain instructions for the body to produce antigens, rather than the antigen itself.

Vaccines sometimes contain other ingredients that make the vaccine safe and more effective.

Do any vaccines contain pork products?

Some vaccines contain pork gelatine to ensure the vaccine remains safe and effective during storage. If you do not want your child to have a vaccine containing pork gelatine for religious or dietary reasons, speak to your healthcare professional about possible alternatives.

Are vaccines safe for children?

Millions of children in the UK and worldwide have had vaccinations against serious illnesses and diseases - and have been kept safe as a result. Getting vaccinated also protects your family, friends and the wider community, especially those that are more vulnerable.

All vaccines undergo rigorous safety tests by law before they can be introduced. Once a vaccine is introduced in the UK it's also monitored for any rare side effects by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA).

Is it safe for my child to have multiple vaccines at once?

Studies have shown that it is safe to have several vaccinations at the same time and your child will be protected from some very serious infections.

Where can I go for more information?

If you have concerns, doubts or questions about vaccines and their safety or side effects, please speak to a GP or other NHS health professional.

There is also a lot of scientific evidence available online from world-leading health and care organisations here in the UK and elsewhere, such as the World Health Organization, the NHS, and Oxford University.

Anti-vaccine stories can often spread online, particularly through social media. They may not be based on scientific evidence and could put your child at risk of serious illness.

Vaccination is the most important thing we can do to protect ourselves and our children against ill health.

You can find out more on the NHS website:

www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/why-vaccination-is-safe-and-important

How to get vaccinations including catch-up vaccinations

Who can get free NHS vaccinations?

Every child is entitled to NHS vaccinations, free of charge. Speak to your GP or check your child's red book to see if they are up to date on their vaccinations.

Does my child need to be registered with a GP to receive their routine vaccinations?

If your child is not registered with a GP, they are still entitled to free vaccinations. Anyone in England can register with a GP surgery, free of charge. You do not need any proof of address or immigration status, ID or an NHS number. You can find a GP surgery at: **www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-gp**

Where can I get more information about children's vaccinations?

Please contact a GP surgery, or look online at:

selondonics.org/childrenshealth

nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations

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General health advice when your child gets ill

Young children often get sick – it is part of growing up. However, it can be stressful for parents and carers. Often, the illness is not serious and the child can be treated safely at home or with support from a GP, pharmacist or health visitor. Check the NHS website for more advice: **www.nhs.uk/conditions/baby/health**

This leaflet is available in large type and different languages.

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