



# VACCINATING YOUR CHILD



Making decisions about your child's health can be difficult, especially when questions or concerns arise. As a parent, you want to protect what matters most to you.

You may be wondering whether vaccination is truly necessary or whether it involves risks. These concerns are completely valid. What we do know is that certain illnesses can be serious and spread easily, especially in settings where people are in close contact. Vaccination helps build collective protection so that children—your child, other children, future generations—as well as older and more vulnerable adults are better protected.

Our role is to support you. We are here to answer your questions, listen to your concerns and provide clear, respectful information, so you can make a decision that feels right for you, one that reflects your values and your vision of wellness for your loved ones.



## THE CHOICE IS YOURS

You are under no obligation to vaccinate your child. As the primary decision-maker for their care, you have the choice to do so or not. Health experts recommend vaccination based on evidence showing its effectiveness in protecting health. They also recommend following a vaccination schedule.

## VACCINATION SCHEDULES

Designed to provide protection at the right time

From their very first months of life, children go through a period when their immune system is still developing, making them more vulnerable to certain illnesses. This is why early vaccination is an important way to protect them during this sensitive stage.

For example, before the age of two, young children are at higher risk of serious complications from pneumococcal disease, which can lead to severe infections such as meningitis, pneumonia or a blood infection (bacteremia). By vaccinating your child at the recommended time, you are giving them essential protection when it is needed most.

We understand that every parent wants what is best for their child. By asking questions and making informed decisions, you play an active and meaningful role in your child's health. Combination vaccines, which protect against several diseases with a single injection, help make this process even simpler.

### Vaccination schedules: How are they developed?

In Canada, once a vaccine has been found safe, the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) issues recommendations on how it should be used. Each province and territory then adapts these recommendations based on the needs of its population. These decisions are grounded in reliable evidence and are intended to help families protect the health of their children and those around them.

### How are vaccination timing and spacing determined?

Specialists determine the most appropriate timing for each vaccine in order to provide optimal protection, based on the natural development of a child's immune system. They also consider the importance of protecting children as early as possible against serious illnesses. These decisions are made carefully, through collaboration, and with families' well-being in mind.

### My child receives several vaccines at the same time; does that put too much strain on their immune system?

This is a completely valid question. In Canada, health experts have carefully studied the administration of multiple vaccines at the same time. Each dose contains only a very small amount of the immunizing agents, far less than what a child's body naturally handles every day. Children's immune systems are strong, even at a very young age. Receiving several vaccines at once does not overload them. This approach allows children to be protected effectively, and sooner. As a parent, your involvement matters, and we are here to support you in making the choices that feel right for you and your child.

### What if my child does not receive their vaccines at the recommended time?

It can happen that the immunization schedule is not followed exactly, whether vaccination was started later than recommended or an appointment was missed. This is completely understandable. The good news is that most childhood vaccines can be given later without having to restart the series. Your child can still be well protected. That said, delaying vaccines may leave your child exposed to certain illnesses at a time when they are more vulnerable, such as early childhood. It is also important to know that each dose plays a specific role: some strengthen or extend immunity, while others ensure that protection is complete.

Each step of the vaccination schedule is designed to offer your child the best possible protection. As a parent, you are doing your best, and we are here to support you, without judgment and with flexibility and respect.



## What if I prefer to spread out my child's vaccines?

Some parents choose to follow a different vaccination schedule. It is completely natural to want what is best for your child. However, it is important to know that delaying certain vaccines can leave children more vulnerable to illnesses during that time. Infections like whooping cough, chickenpox or pneumococcal pneumonia are still present in Canada. Delays in vaccination can increase the risk of your child contracting one of these diseases. Each recommended dose is designed to provide protection at the right time.

## ARE TRADITIONAL MEDICINES, LIKE MEDICINAL PLANTS, AN ALTERNATIVE TO VACCINES?

Using medicines from the land is a traditional and valued practice in many communities. However, it does not replace the immunity provided by vaccination.

### Myths

Can my child still get sick after being vaccinated? This is a common question, and it is completely normal to wonder. What you may have observed is true: sometimes a vaccinated child can still get sick. Vaccines are not perfect, but they provide very strong protection in about 98% of cases. And when a vaccinated child does get sick, the illness is usually much milder, as if the body has been prepared to defend itself. This is especially true for illnesses like the flu or chickenpox, where immunization often helps prevent more severe disease. By vaccinating, you are helping your child's body learn to recognize threats and defend itself faster.

## Can vaccination cause side effects?

Like any health intervention, vaccination is not entirely without risk, and we believe it is important to talk about this with you openly and respectfully. The vast majority of children will experience mild reactions, such as a slight fever, tiredness or redness at the injection site. These are signs that the body is responding and learning to recognize what it may encounter in the future. More serious reactions are possible but very rare, for example, an allergic reaction. Every vaccine is carefully tested before use, and in Canada, great care is taken to monitor safety at every step.

There is also a national system in place to monitor all side effects, no matter how mild. If a child reacts more strongly than expected, it is reported and documented, which allows for quick action. This safety net exists for you, for your child and for families.

We are here to support you with honesty, to listen and to support you in your decisions. This medical knowledge is shared with humility, acknowledging that you also bring your own knowledge, parental instincts, traditions and unique ways of caring for your children.

If you have questions or concerns, we are here to talk, without pressure. You are the ones best placed to make this decision for your family.



## Vaccine injection pain: How to help your child

As a parent, your presence and the way you support your child make all the difference. It is true that vaccination can cause a little pain or stress, especially for young children. There are several simple and effective ways to reduce discomfort and anxiety before, during and after the shot. Your child will feel safe when they sense that you are there, being calm and comforting. We can show you techniques such as reassuring positions, breastfeeding during or after the vaccination or using distractions like singing, a toy or a story. These small gestures, given with warmth and care, can make a big difference.

We can go through these together. You are not alone in this moment. We are here to support you, like a circle around your child.



## What could happen if I decide not to vaccinate my child?

If your child never encounters a vaccine-preventable disease, they may never experience health problems from it. But in our reality—especially in cities, where people come and go and interact constantly—the risk of exposure is very real.

If a disease is circulating and your child is not protected, they have a good chance of getting it. And even if your child is healthy and recovers well, they could unknowingly pass it on to others: a baby too young to be vaccinated, an older person with a weakened immune system or a sick relative. The health of one child can affect the whole circle.

This is not meant to scare you, but to show that your role is important—powerful, even. Whatever your decision, we are here to talk, offering a space free of judgment, where you can ask questions and make informed choices that reflect your values and reality.

## Is my child really at risk of exposure to a vaccine-preventable disease?

Certain diseases have indeed become rare in Canada thanks to vaccination. That said, others are still present in other parts of the world, and international travel can bring these infections back here.

For example, diphtheria and polio still exist in certain countries, and diseases like measles, pneumococcal pneumonia and influenza circulate worldwide. If too many people are unvaccinated, these diseases could become more common again, even here at home.

## Why is my child's immunization important?

As a parent, you carry a big responsibility: protecting your child as best you can. This is not always easy, especially in a world where information moves quickly, sometimes too quickly, and is not always clear.

What science has taught us, along with lessons from lived experience, is that vaccination is a powerful tool to prevent serious illnesses. It is a bit like strengthening the body's defences before danger arrives.

In the teachings of our culture, we are reminded that decisions are not made just for ourselves, but for the whole circle: our family, loved ones, community and those who come after us. By choosing to vaccinate your child, you are also helping protect the most vulnerable around you: babies too young to be vaccinated, older people and those who cannot get the vaccine.

The decision is yours. We are here to walk this part of the path with you. Our role is simply to share the knowledge we have, so you can make your decision with awareness and confidence.