

# Vaccination and Immunisation



## Introduction

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## What is vaccination and immunisation?

Vaccination is the process of giving you a type of medicine called a vaccine which helps to protect you from being infected by virus or bacteria.

*Once you have been vaccinated, your body develops immunity to that infection (through antibodies) - this means that if you come into contact with that virus or bacteria later, you are unlikely to catch that infection or you may have a less severe illness.*

Some vaccinations also need a booster, such as Tetanus vaccines, as the immunity they provide can decrease over time. This means even if you've had an injection in the past, your body might need an extra dose later to top up your immunity.

## **What vaccinations do people get at school?**

Most young people get their vaccines at high school. Examples of vaccines you can have at high school include:

- Combination diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis (whooping cough) (dTpa) vaccine –protects against three diseases and requires boosters (recommended every 10 years. Diphtheria is a rare infection which can cause a swelling of tissues in the throat and difficulty breathing. Tetanus is an infection that causes spasming of the muscles and difficulty breathing. Pertussis causes a bad cough, which can be very serious if spread to infants.
- Human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine – protects against 9 types of HPV. HPV can cause cancer of the cervix, vagina, penis, vulva, anus and throat and genital warts.
- Meningococcal ACWY vaccine protects against four types of meningococcal disease (A, C, W and Y). Meningococcal disease can cause infection of the tissues around the brain (meningitis) or infection of the blood (septicaemia).

## **What if I missed my vaccinations at school?**

Some young people miss out on getting their vaccine at school, for example, if they have been away from school on the vaccination day. If this happens, they might be able to get the vaccine later that year.

NSW Health will write to parents/guardians who give consent for vaccination if catch-up vaccination will be offered at school in the following year or to recommend that they should go to their local doctor to have the vaccine they need.

For more information visit the [NSW Health website](#) about vaccines given in high school or the [NSW Health website](#) about vaccinations for young people aged 17-19.

# **I'm worried about getting a vaccine or the side effects of a vaccine.**

If you're worried about getting a vaccination, it helps to understand exactly what vaccines you are going to have, what they protect you against, what will happen on the day at school when you have a vaccine and how you might feel afterwards.

Some things that people can be worried about when receiving vaccination:

- How much the needle hurts.
- How they might react to the needle or the vaccination.
- Side effects of the vaccination.
- What is in the vaccination or how it might impact their health.
- Some people are afraid of needles and very occasionally faint.

If you are worried about any of these issues it is helpful to talk to your doctor or school nurse about your concerns.

The doctor or nurse can give you information on the vaccine, how it works, and if it might impact you in any way and they can help you through the process. You can also have a friend with you when you have the vaccine.

## **Sides effects of vaccines**

You may experience minor side effects following vaccination. Most reactions are mild and last no more than a couple of days and you will recover without any problems.

Common side effects include:

- mild pain, redness and swelling at the injection site,
- mild fever,
- mild headache,
- mild aches and pains.

What to do if a local reaction occurs at the injection site:

- put a dampcloth on the injection site to relieve tenderness,
- take paracetamol for pain,
- drink extra fluids.

If you have these side effects, there is no risk, and it does not mean there is a problem with the vaccination.

But if you are concerned that the side effects are getting worse or are unusual, call your doctor to discuss what to do.

## **COVID-19 vaccines**

There are currently a number of vaccines available for COVID-19. The vaccine recommended for you will depend on your age and other eligibility requirements.

Information on COVID-19 vaccines is constantly changing due to the changing circumstances around the COVID-19 virus.

It is best to check the latest information on the [NSW Health website](#) to keep up to date with COVID-19 information. [You can also read the frequently asked questions \(FAQs\) about COVID-19 vaccinations.](#)

Everyone aged 5 years and older can now book a vaccination through the [Vaccine Clinic Finder](#).

*Health services will make every effort to help you to receive your COVID-19 vaccination. It's important to be respectful and work with a GP (doctor) to find out which vaccine is right for you.*

COVID-19 vaccines are free for everyone in Australia regardless of Medicare or visa status.

To book an appointment, use the [Vaccine Clinic Finder](#).

If you have a question or need information about COVID-19 or the COVID-19 vaccines:

- Speak to your GP (doctor) to help you make an informed decision
- [Complete the online form](#)
- Call the helpline on [1800 020 080](tel:1800020080) (24 hours a day, 7 days a week)



## Vaccines for travelling

If you plan on travelling overseas, talk to your GP (doctor) to see what vaccinations or other medications you might need to take with you.

It's a good idea to visit your doctor at least a month before you plan on travelling.

You can get a copy of your vaccination history from the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) at any time by:

- Using your Medicare online account through [MyGov](#)
- Using the [Medicare Express Plus App](#)
- Calling the AIR General Enquiries Line on [1800 653 809](tel:1800653809).

You should also check if the countries you are visiting require you to have proof of

specific vaccinations.

For example, to travel to Colombia, you need to have a Yellow Fever vaccination and a certificate to prove that you had it 30 days before going to the country.

Sometimes a vaccination isn't needed but other medication might be prescribed to you, such as malaria tablets if you are travelling to some parts of Thailand or Indonesia.

For more information and tips on staying healthy while travelling, visit [NSW Health](#).