



# Vaccines have the power to protect your child.

Making sure your child is up to date on their vaccines is one of the most important things you can do to protect them from harmful diseases. To keep you on track, Highmark is here to help you understand vaccines and how they work so you can keep your child safe — now and in the future.

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## How vaccines strengthen your baby's immune system

- Children are exposed to thousands of germs every day through the food they eat, the air they breathe, and the things they put in their mouths.
- Babies are born with immune systems that can fight most germs, but there are some diseases they can't handle — that's why vaccines are recommended.
- Vaccines use very small amounts of antigens (parts of germs that cause the baby's immune system to go to work) to help your child's immune system recognize and learn to fight serious diseases. Your child may need more than one dose to boost their immunity.

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## How your child's immune system and vaccines work together

- The body's immune system fights off infections caused by germs that can make your child sick. Once it fights off the infection, the body has a supply of cells, called antibodies, that help recognize and fight that disease in the future.
- Vaccines help develop immunity by imitating an infection, but the "imitation" doesn't make your child sick. Instead, it causes the immune system to make antibodies to protect your child from vaccine-preventable diseases.



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**As protection from childhood vaccines wears off, preteens and teens need additional vaccines to prolong protection.**

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## Vaccine side effects/risks\*

- Like any medication, vaccines can cause side effects — most of which are mild and go away within a few days. They include redness and swelling where the shot was given, low-grade fever, and fussiness. Pay extra attention to your child for a few days after vaccination. If you see something that concerns you, call your child's doctor.
- There are certain exceptions to vaccination, including children who have a chronic medical condition, a disease that weakens the immune system, or have had a severe allergic reaction to a previous dose of a vaccine.
- Talk to your child's doctor about possible side effects, risks, and exceptions to vaccination.

**Serious side effects after vaccination are very rare, and doctors and clinic staff are trained to handle them.**

\*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): [www.cdc.gov/vaccines](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines)

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