AAP Guide: Vaccines Your Child Needs by Age 6

By: Edith Bracho-Sánchez, MD, FAAP

Have you ever wondered why babies get vaccines starting from the day they're born? One big reason: the youngest of us are most at risk of getting sick. It's also the time in your child's development that their immune system learns the most from the vaccine.

Early immunizations help children build immunity at the best time—before they are exposed to germs that can make them very sick. We can prevent life-threatening diseases with vaccines. That's why most of the childhood vaccines are recommended during your baby's first 12 (/English/ages-stages/Your-Childs-Checkups/Pages/Your-Checkup-Checklist-12-Months-Old.aspx) to 18 (/English/ages-stages/Your-Childs-Checkups/Pages/your-checkup-checklist-18-months-old.aspx) months of life.

AAP immunization recommendations for babies & young kids

The recommended immunization schedule (/English/safety-prevention/immunizations/Pages/Recommended-Immunization-Schedules.aspx) from the American Academy of Pediatrics (https://downloads.aap.org/AAP/PDF/AAP-Immunization-Schedule.pdf?_gl=1%2axow51o%2a_ga%2aMTI1NzUyNDI2MS4xNzY2MTY5NTg0%2a_ga_FD9D3XZVQQ%2aczE3NjkxODMzMzckbzQyJGcxJHQxNzY5MTg2MTExJGozOCRsMCRoMA..) (AAP) is based on ongoing review of the most recent scientific evidence for each of the immunizations. To be included in the AAP schedule, the vaccines must be licensed for use (/English/safety-prevention/immunizations/Pages/how-vaccines-are-developed-tested-for-safety-and-approved-step-by-step.aspx) in the United States. ***Learn why pediatricians use the AAP evidence-based recommendations vs. other schedules in this article*** (/English/tips-tools/ask-the-pediatrician/Pages/what-is-the-difference-between-the-AAP-recommended-immunization-schedule-and-other-vaccine-schedules.aspx)***.***

Twelve national organizations representing more than 1 million clinicians, physicians, pharmacists and other pediatric health care professionals agree (/English/news/Pages/AAPs-recommended-childhood-and-adolescent-immunization-schedule-for-2026.aspx) with the AAP immunization schedule.

Your pediatrician keeps track of your child's vaccines. They help you ensure your child is protected at the right time. They can also let you know when to schedule the next shot or help your child get caught up on any vaccinations they may have missed.

View the recommended immunizations from birth through 6 years old **here (http://downloads.aap.org/HC/EN/childvaccineschedule.pdf?_gl=1%2a1gnzjck%2a_ga%2aMTI1NzUyNDI2MS4xNzY2MTY5NTg0%2a_ga_FD9D3XZVQQ%2aczE3NjkxODMzMzckbzQyJGcxJHQxNzY5MTg1MzkwJGoyMSRsMCRoMA..)**.

How many diseases does a child's immune system learn to resist by kindergarten?

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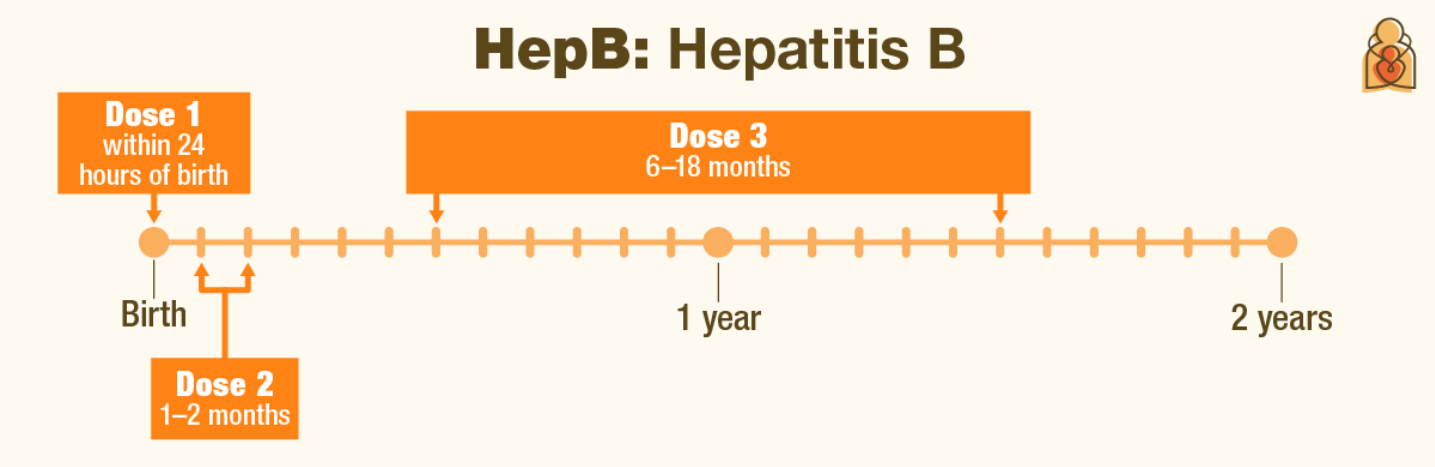
By the time a child is old enough to start school, vaccines provide their immune system information to resist 16 diseases! From birth to age 6 years old, infants and children get the following immunizations: hepatitis B, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), rotavirus, diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough (pertussis), *Haemophilus influenzae* type b, polio, pneumococcal disease, COVID, flu (influenza), measles, mumps, rubella, chickenpox (varicella) and hepatitis A.

What immunizations are given at birth?

Hepatitis B (/English/safety-prevention/immunizations/Pages/hepatitis-b-vaccine-what-you-need-to-know.aspx) is the first vaccine most babies receive. It is given within 24 hours of birth. Your baby needs a second dose of hepatitis B vaccine (/English/safety-prevention/immunizations/Pages/hepatitis-b-vaccine-what-you-need-to-know.aspx) when they are 1 month to 2 months old and the third dose when they are 6 months to 18 months old..



Why do pediatricians recommend the first dose of hepatitis B vaccine so soon? More than 1 million people in the U.S. have long-term hepatitis B infections. And people who are infected with hepatitis B as a baby have a 90% chance of developing serious, chronic conditions like liver damage and liver cancer in their lifetime. People may not know they are infected. It can spread easily if they come in close contact with your baby. Getting all three doses of the vaccine is a very effective way to make sure that your child has long-term immunity.

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is usually common in the late fall through early spring months. This virus is the top cause of hospitalization for babies. There is an RSV immunization for babies and some toddlers. There is also an RSV vaccine that moms can get during pregnancy. You can get it when you are 32 through 36 weeks pregnant to give your baby protective antibodies if they will be born right before or during RSV season. Learn more here (/English/health-issues/conditions/chest-lungs/Pages/rsv-respiratory-syncytial-virus-symptoms-causes-and-treatment.aspx).

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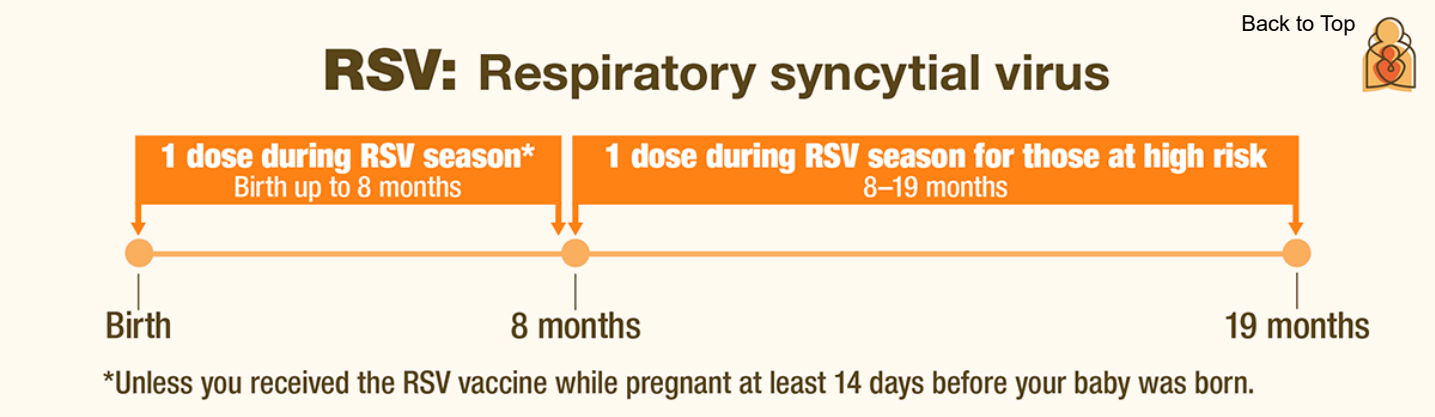
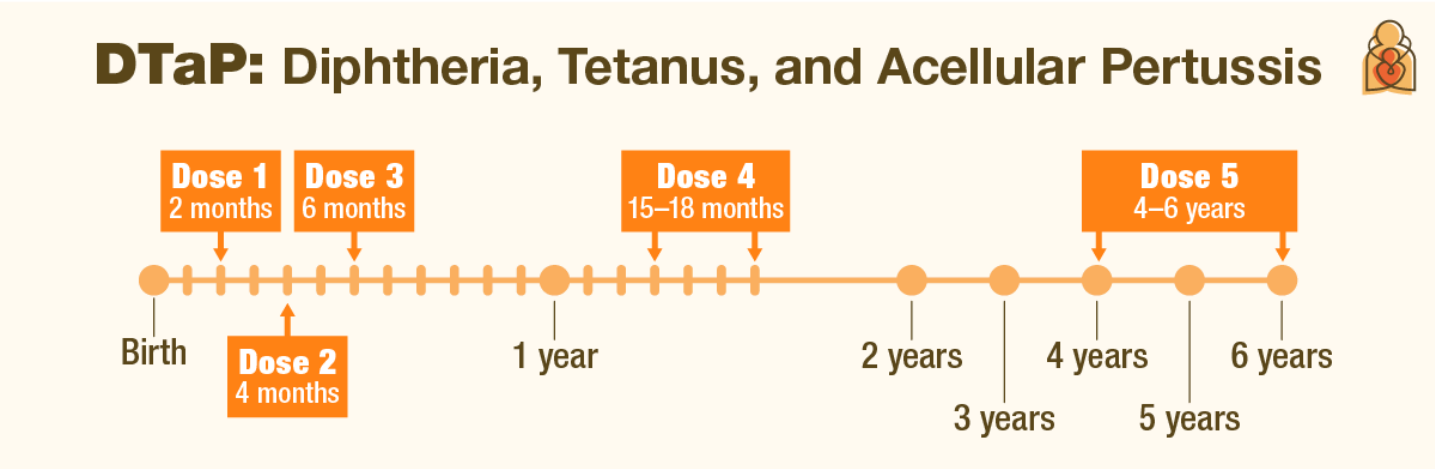


Your child's next immunizations

2 months old

The first doses of the vaccines that are given at two months of age protect babies from 7 diseases. Their names may look like a jumble of alphabet letters. But the letters stand for the diseases that used to cause serious infections in children. Combining protection in one shot means fewer needle sticks. Your child's immune system is protected from multiple diseases at once.

Diphtheria, tetanus and acellular pertussis (DTaP) vaccine



Children get 5 doses of DTaP vaccine. The vaccine prevents serious illness from three diseases:

- **Diphtheria** is a disease that causes a serious throat infection, breathing problems and heart failure. Before we had a vaccine, diphtheria killed 1 out of every 5 kids who were infected. The vaccine is a lifesaver.
- **Tetanus** is caused by bacteria that naturally live in the soil or dust. You can be exposed to it through any break in your skin, like a cut or puncture wound. Tetanus makes a toxin that causes painful muscle spasms. Another name for tetanus is "lockjaw," because it can cause a person's neck and jaw muscles to lock. This makes it hard to open the mouth or swallow. We can never get rid of tetanus from our world, so the vaccine is the best way to prevent it.
- **Pertussis:** Also called "whooping cough (/English/health-issues/conditions/chest-lungs/Pages/Whooping-Cough.aspx)," it causes violent coughing fits that make it hard to breathe. Babies with pertussis may need hospital care and are at risk of death. Often, pertussis is spread to the baby by an adult or sibling who does not know they have it.

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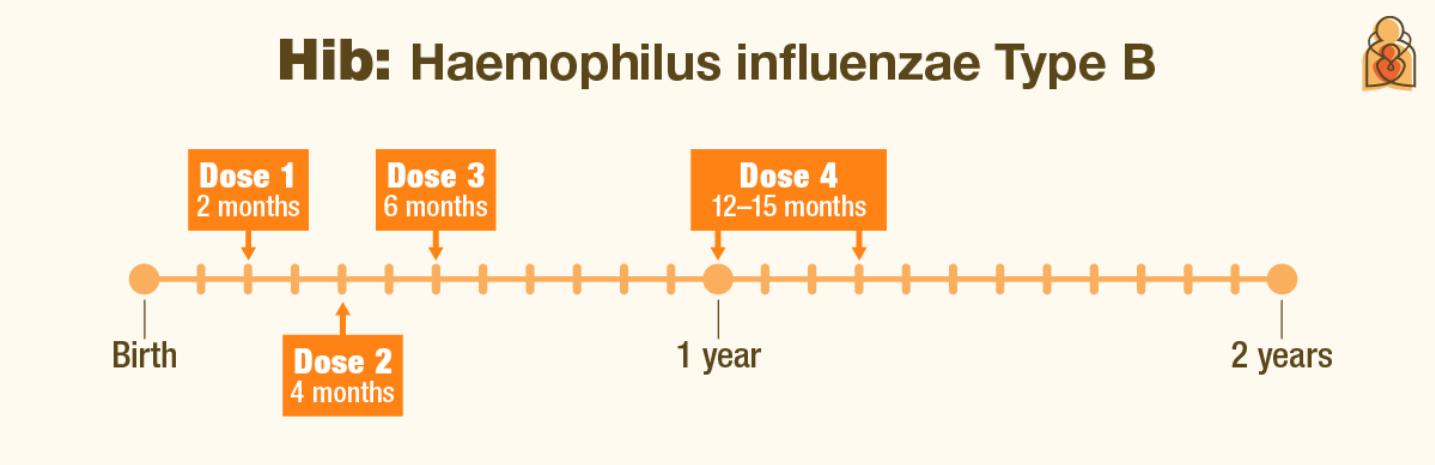
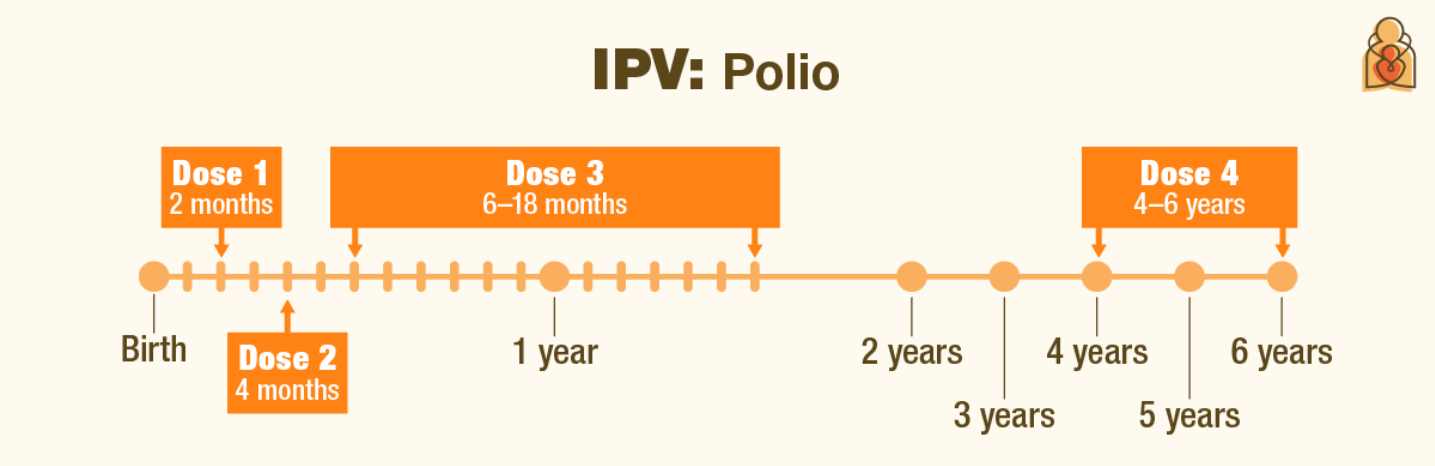
***Haemophilus influenzae* type B (Hib) vaccine** (3 or 4 doses) prevents several types of illness, including ear infections, lung infection, swelling in the throat and swelling in the lining of the brain and spinal cord (meningitis (/English/health-issues/conditions/head-neck-nervous-system/Pages/Meningitis.aspx)). Infections can be life threatening. If babies have not been vaccinated and have symptoms of meningitis, they may need a spinal tap to test the spinal fluid for the bacteria.



Polio (IPV) vaccine (4 doses) prevents a disease that causes death and paralysis. Polio (/English/health-issues/vaccine-preventable-diseases/Pages/Polio.aspx) outbreaks still occur in the United States, so unvaccinated children are at risk.



Pneumococcal vaccine (4 doses) prevents disease caused by bacteria called *Streptococcus pneumoniae*. When these bacteria invade the lungs, they can cause pneumonia. When they invade the bloodstream, they can cause an overwhelming infection called sepsis. When they invade the tissue around the brain, they can cause meningitis. They can also cause ear infections—which most parents know can be painful and occur frequently. Some people with high-risk conditions may need more doses. Since we have had this vaccine, the number of kids developing all of these illnesses has dropped dramatically.

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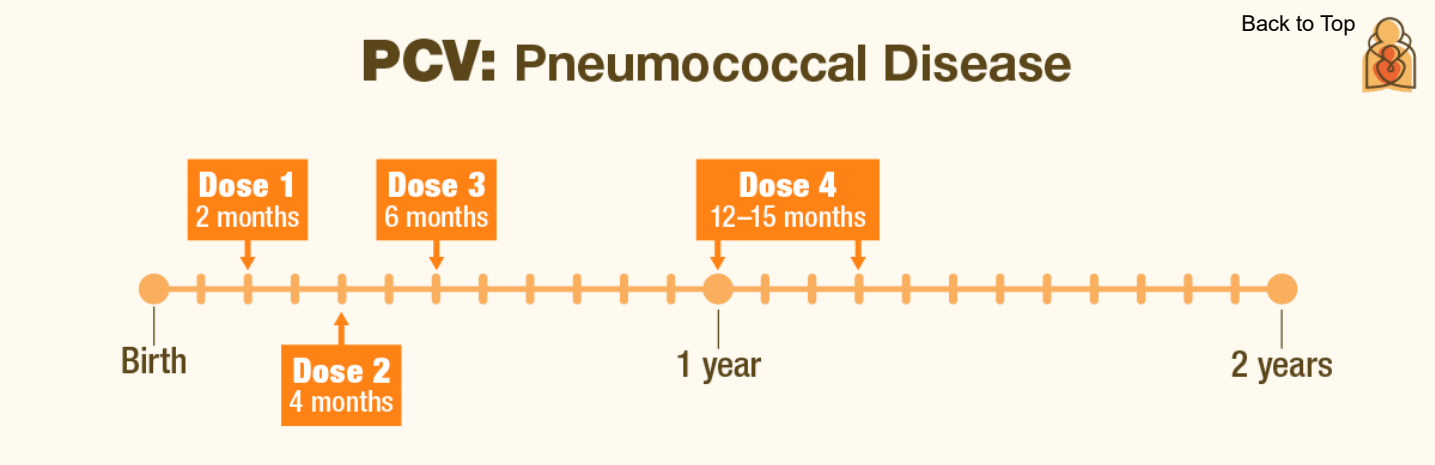
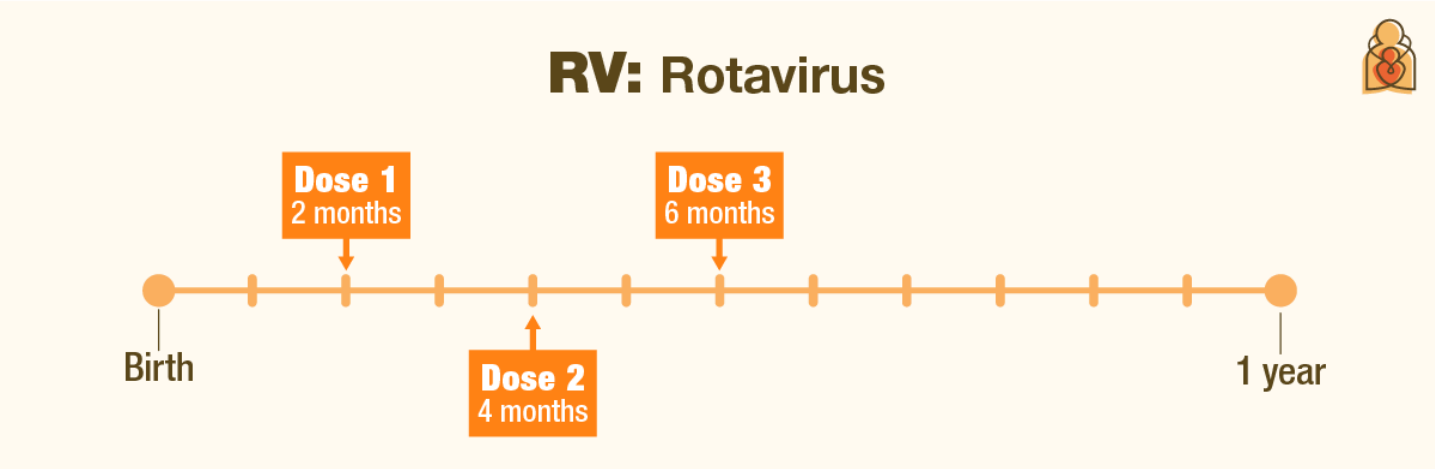


Rotavirus (RV) vaccine (2 or 3 doses) stops the main cause of diarrhea in children. This virus spreads very easily—on your hands, soiled diapers or toys, and through the air. Rotavirus infections cause severe, watery diarrhea, vomiting, fever and abdominal pain. Sometimes the virus causes children to become so dehydrated that they need hospital care.



6 months old

The AAP recommends the **COVID vaccine** for all young children age 6 months through 23 months. Children younger than 2 years old are at highest risk for severe COVID-19 and hospitalization. Beyond that age, it recommends the vaccine for children and teens with risk factors for COVID. The vaccine also should be available for children ages 2-18 who do not fall into these risk groups, but whose parent wants them to have COVID vaccine protection. Learn more here (/English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/when-can-kids-get-the-COVID-vaccine-or-booster.aspx).

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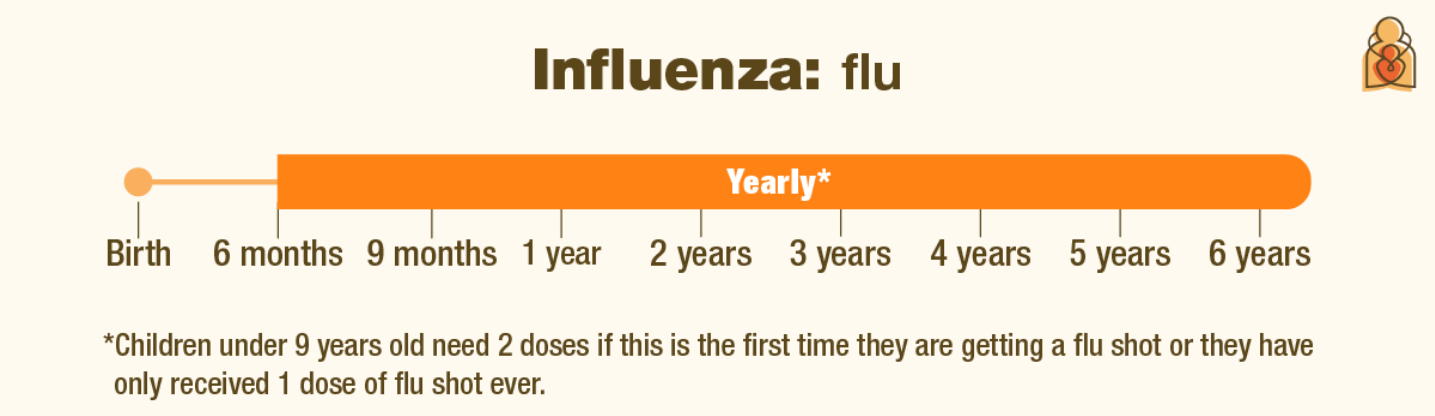
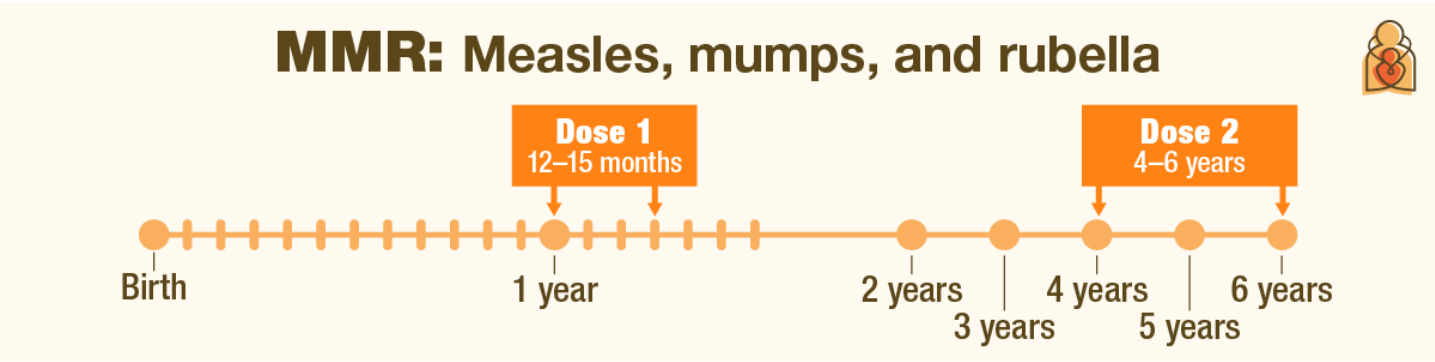
The flu vaccine is recommended for everyone starting at 6 months of age, with rare exceptions. The first time your child gets the flu (influenza) vaccine, if they are younger than 9 years old, they will also need a second dose 4 weeks later. Even healthy kids can develop severe complications from the flu that requires a hospital stay. Flu viruses change from year to year, so everyone needs to get a flu shot each year. Annual flu shots (/English/health-issues/conditions/flu/Pages/default.aspx) keep children from severe disease.



12 to 18 months old

At your child's first birthday checkup (/English/ages-stages/Your-Childs-Checkups/Pages/Your-Checkup-Checklist-12-Months-Old.aspx) (or soon after), they will get shots that protect them from 5 more diseases. They also may get second, third or fourth doses of the vaccines they started during the first year.

Measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccine



Children get 2 doses of MMR vaccine. Some children at higher risk may need 3 doses if there is a disease outbreak. Most people who are vaccinated with MMR will be protected for life. The vaccine prevents serious illness from three diseases:

- **Measles** (/English/safety-prevention/immunizations/Pages/how-to-protect-your-children-during-a-measles-outbreak.aspx) can cause rash, fever, cough, runny nose, and pink eye (conjunctivitis). It can lead to seizures (often associated with fever), ear infections, diarrhea, and pneumonia. Rarely, measles can cause brain damage or death.
- **Mumps (/English/health-issues/vaccine-preventable-diseases/Pages/Mumps.aspx)** can cause swollen salivary glands (under the jaw), fever, headache, muscle aches and tiredness. It can lead to deafness, swelling of the brain and/or spinal cord covering, painful swelling of the testicles or ovaries and, very rarely, death.
- **Rubella (/English/health-issues/vaccine-preventable-diseases/Pages/German-Measles-´28Rubella%29.aspx)** can cause fever, sometimes rash, and swollen lymph nodes. A pregnant person who gets .bella could have a miscarriage or the baby could be born prematurely or have serious birth defects.

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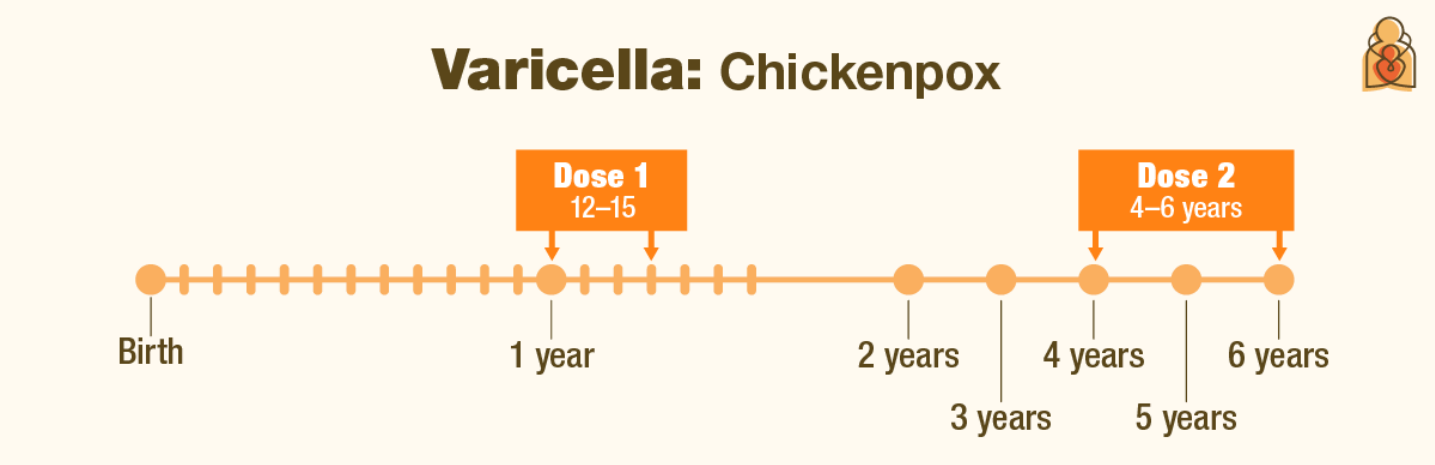
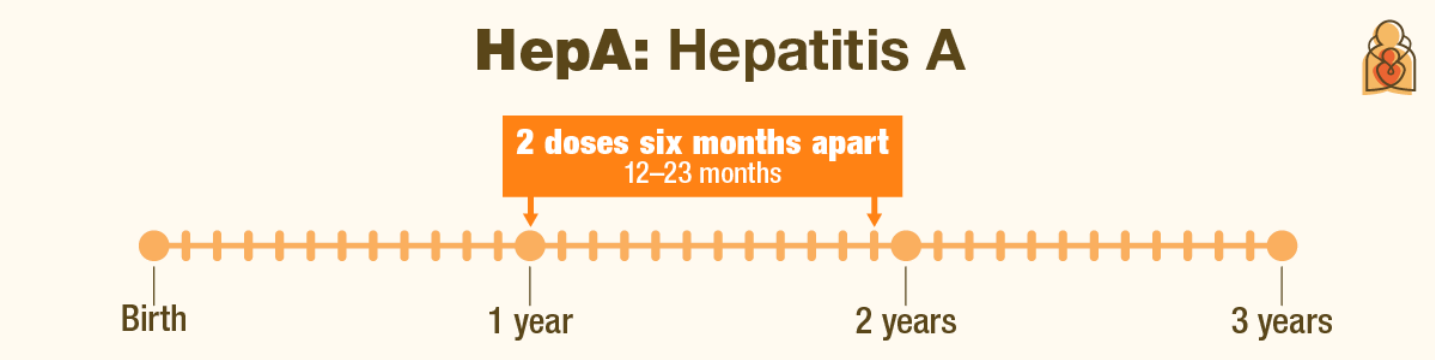
Varicella vaccine (2 doses) prevents "chickenpox (/English/health-issues/vaccine-preventable-diseases/Pages/Varicella-ChickenPox.aspx)," which used to infect 4 million people in the United States every year. More than 10,000 were hospitalized, and more than 100 died. A mild case can cause a child to miss school for a week or more. Usually, the MMR vaccine and varicella vaccine are given separately for the first dose. The MMRV vaccine may be used for the first dose instead if parents express a preference.



Hepatitis A vaccine (2 doses given 6 months apart) provides lifelong protection from a serious liver disease. The disease can spread through contaminated food or water or direct contact with an infected person—even someone who doesn't show any symptoms.



Fun fact: Vaccines protect babies before birth!

It's true. Babies get antibodies during pregnancy from some vaccines their birth parent has had. For example, the baby is protected for a short time after they are born if their mother gets the whooping cough vaccine during pregnancy. This is called passive immunity.

However, this protection moms give their babies during pregnancy starts to wear off a few months after they are born. That's why, when they are 2 months old, babies get a shot to keep their immune system protected.

Remember

We know from decades of research that the vaccines work best at these ages, and with this spacing (/English/safety-prevention/immunizations/Pages/Multiple-Vaccinations-at-One-Time.aspx)between doses. The pace has a purpose: to keep your child healthy and active. It also keeps others healthy by preventing outbreaks (/English/safety-prevention/immunizations/Pages/Protecting-Your-Baby-from-a-Measles-Outbreak-FAQs.aspx) at child care, pool and school.

Ask your pediatrician if your child is caught up on routine vaccines. When they follow the schedule, children develop lasting immunity—and protect others—from serious diseases. If you have any questions or concerns, talk with your pediatrician. We are here to partner with you to help your child stay healthy and thrive.

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More information

- All About the AAP Recommended Immunization Schedule (/English/safety-prevention/immunizations/Pages/Recommended-Immunization-Schedules.aspx)
- Vaccine Safety: Examine the Evidence (/English/safety-prevention/immunizations/Pages/vaccine-studies-examine-the-evidence.aspx)
- Measles: What Parents Need to Know (/English/health-issues/vaccine-preventable-diseases/Pages/Measles.aspx#measles-school-daycare-outbreak)
- Why Do Babies Need the Hepatitis B Vaccine? (/English/safety-prevention/immunizations/Pages/hepatitis-b-vaccine-what-you-need-to-know.aspx)
- Multiple Vaccines at One Time (/English/safety-prevention/immunizations/Pages/Multiple-Vaccinations-at-One-Time.aspx)

About Dr. Bracho-Sánchez

Edith Bracho-Sánchez, MD, FAAP, is a primary care pediatrician and director of the pediatric telemedicine program at Columbia University Irving Medical Center. She was born and raised in Caracas, Venezuela, earned her medical degree from New York University and trained in pediatrics at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. Dr. Bracho-Sánchez, who hosts the AAP's Healthy Children podcast (/English/tips-tools/healthy-children-podcast/Pages/podcast.aspx), lives in New York City with her husband and son.

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