

How Vaccine Schedules Changed Over Time & Why

By: Robert W. Frenck, Jr., MD, FAAP

From the beginning, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has been a leader in childhood vaccine schedules. The goal has always been to give kids the support they need to grow and thrive with recommended immunization schedules ([/English/safety-prevention/immunizations/Pages/Recommended-Immunization-Schedules.aspx](#)) based on science.



For more than 90 years (<https://stories.aap.org/aap-95th-anniversary/index.html>), parents and pediatricians have relied on AAP vaccine recommendations to keep children healthy and active. In turn, this has made our communities happier and healthier.

Curious about the history of vaccines? Read on to learn how the AAP has been part of the creation of vaccine schedules every step of the way.

Why are there so many more vaccines now than when your grandparents were kids? Pediatrician Alok Patel explains in this video:



The first vaccine recommendations for children

The AAP made the first vaccine recommendations for children in the late 1930s. This was years before other groups of scientists, health professionals or the government published their vaccine recommendations.

In 1938, the AAP printed a booklet with vaccine guidance for pediatricians. The publication had a red cover, which led to its nickname, "The Red Book" (https://publications.aap.org/redbook?_gl=1%2a4eez8x%2a_ga%2aMTc1NTg1MjQwNC4xNzMzMjM3MDEy%2a_ga_FD9D3XZVQQ%2aczE3NTM5NzkxNzQkbzU4MSRnMSR0MTc1Mzk3OTQwMSRqNTkkaDAkDA.)^{Back to Top}. Since the first edition (https://aap2.silverchair-cdn.com/aap2/content_public/cms/resources/23109/redbook_1938.pdf), the AAP *Red Book* has provided critical information about vaccines to prevent and treat diseases in children.

At the time of the first AAP *Red Book*, routine immunizations were available only for smallpox, diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis (whooping cough). Parents were relieved these vaccines (<https://www.chop.edu/vaccine-education-center/science-history/vaccine-history/developments-by-year>) existed. However, kids also needed protection from other illnesses that made them very sick. It was valuable to have the original AAP *Red Book*, but there was more work to do.

Taking the first steps to create vaccine schedules

In the 1940s, the AAP led the first discussions and studies about the best timing for vaccines and number of shots for children. Pediatricians and researchers published their work in medical journals like *Pediatrics*. They met to share and debate the best and newest practices. The AAP used the highest quality science to guide the best decisions for children and their families. The result was the development of new and better vaccine recommendations.

As doctors learned more about diseases and other vaccines became available for children, recommendations evolved, and the vaccine schedule was updated.

By the 1960s, we also had vaccines against polio, measles, mumps and rubella. The positive effect was almost immediate. For example, cases of polio and measles dropped by over 90%.

Joining forces to create a single vaccine schedule

In 1964, the AAP, the government and other groups like the American Public Health Association began talks about having a single vaccine schedule. All agreed that a unified policy would be the best for U.S. children. It would save even more lives.

An independent group of experts known as the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0264410X14013115>) was formed. It was charged with reviewing the latest research and advising the American public on immunizations for children and adults.

The AAP worked closely with the ACIP, and in 1995 this resulted in the creation of a single vaccine schedule (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0264410X14013115>). The schedule was easy to understand, and it included the immunizations children needed.

Many older pediatricians still recall the time before a vaccine against a serious infection called *H. influenzae* type b, or "Hib," was available. Hib sickened 20,000 children (<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/00056803.htm>) each year. The Hib vaccine became available in the late 1980s, and the AAP recommended it for children in 1990. Within 2 years of introducing the Hib vaccine, cases dropped by 71% (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/8417239/>).

What today's vaccine schedule looks like & why it makes sense

Thanks to medical advances, we now have more life-saving vaccines. Today, the recommended schedule has vaccines against more than 20 different infections. Most of these infections used to be common and often serious or deadly for children. Thanks to vaccines, they have become a rarity.

Before new vaccines are added to the schedule, they are studied in detail. Each one is tested against placebos and the current vaccines. (Learn more about "How Vaccines Are Developed, Safety Tested & Approved: Step by Step" (</English/safety-prevention/immunizations/Pages/how-vaccines-are-developed-tested-for-safety-and-approved-step-by-step.aspx>).")

Because of vaccines, most of us have never seen a child or adult with diphtheria, smallpox or Hib. Your child's pediatrician may not have seen these (</English/safety-prevention/immunizations/Pages/Vaccination-Protects-Against-These-Diseases.aspx>) diseases in their patients. And that is a good thing. It means almost no one has been

infected with them in the past few decades. It is proof that vaccines are doing their job and keeping communities healthy. [Back to Top](#)

We understand that you or your loved ones may have questions. After all, there are more vaccines now than before. Pediatricians welcome those questions. They are ready to hear your concerns and provide trusted information to solve any doubts you have.

Pediatricians have the information you can trust

Finding answers to questions about your child's health on your own can be overwhelming. How do you know what to trust?

Your pediatrician knows your child's unique health needs and has been tracking their development for years. They want to see your child strong and healthy. The internet is another story. Whether it's on social media or search results, health information online can grab our attention and cause strong emotions. It may seem clear and easy to understand, but support ideas that are not necessarily true (https://www.aap.org/en/news-room/fact-checked?_gl=1%2a2cvtlg%2a_ga%2aMjA5MTMyOTk0NC4xNzM2OTcwMTg5%2a_ga_FD9D3XZVQQ%2aczE3NTM5NzQ1NDkkbzM5NSRnMSROMTc1Mzk3NTEzNyRqNTgkbDAkaDA.) or backed by science. Unfortunately, some people take advantage of this. They spread false or misleading information to sell products or promote unreliable advice.

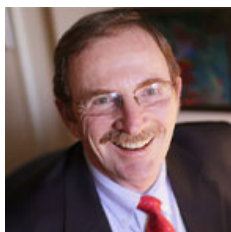
Remember

The best strategy is to bring all your concerns about immunization schedules, or any other concerns about your child's health, to your pediatrician. They are ready to give you the most reliable information so you can best support your child's health.

More information

- [Why Pediatricians Recommend Vaccines: An Open Letter to Parents \(/English/safety-prevention/immunizations/Pages/why-pediatricians-recommend-vaccines-a-message-to-parents.aspx\)](/English/safety-prevention/immunizations/Pages/why-pediatricians-recommend-vaccines-a-message-to-parents.aspx)
- [All About the Recommended Immunization Schedules \(/English/safety-prevention/immunizations/Pages/Recommended-Immunization-Schedules.aspx\)](/English/safety-prevention/immunizations/Pages/Recommended-Immunization-Schedules.aspx)
- [Vaccine Ingredients: Frequently Asked Questions \(/English/safety-prevention/immunizations/Pages/Vaccine-Ingredients-Frequently-Asked-Questions.aspx\)](/English/safety-prevention/immunizations/Pages/Vaccine-Ingredients-Frequently-Asked-Questions.aspx)
- [Multiple Vaccinations at One Time \(/English/safety-prevention/immunizations/Pages/Multiple-Vaccinations-at-One-Time.aspx\)](/English/safety-prevention/immunizations/Pages/Multiple-Vaccinations-at-One-Time.aspx)
- [Vaccine Safety: Examine the Evidence \(/English/safety-prevention/at-play/Pages/default.aspx\)](/English/safety-prevention/at-play/Pages/default.aspx)

About Dr. Freneck



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