

# Vaccines When Your Child Is Sick

Last updated April 2014

**A mild illness is usually not a reason to reschedule vaccinations. Your doctor can help you decide which vaccines your child can still receive safely.**

## Children with mild illness may still get vaccines—even if they have a fever

It's tempting to cancel or reschedule a doctor's appointment for vaccines when your child has the sniffles, an upset stomach, or a low-grade fever. But doctors at leading health organizations, like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the American Academy of Family Physicians, and the American Academy of Pediatrics say mild illness usually is not a reason to put off vaccinations.

Your child may still be vaccinated if he or she has:

- A low-grade fever (less than 101 degrees)
- A cold, runny nose, or cough
- Ear infection (otitis media)
- Mild diarrhea

There is no health benefit to waiting to vaccinate your child if he or she has a mild illness. It's important that children get their vaccines on time—even if they don't feel well—so they're protected against serious diseases. Your child's doctor can help you determine if your child can be vaccinated if they have a mild illness.

## Vaccines do not make a mild illness worse

A child's immune system is able to respond to millions of antigens every day. Antigens are things like bacteria and viruses that cause your child's body to produce antibodies against them. Vaccines have only a tiny fraction of the antigens that children encounter naturally. So, the immune system can handle getting vaccines to build immunity to diseases and fight minor illnesses at the same time.

Vaccines do not make symptoms of illness worse—though they may cause mild side effects, like a mild fever or soreness or swelling where the shot was given. To help with discomfort from these side effects, put a cool, wet washcloth on the sore area or ask your child's doctor about using pain- or fever-reducing medicine.



Your child's doctor can help determine the vaccines your child can safely get at each visit.

## **Vaccines are safe and effective when given to children with mild illness**

Mild illness also does not affect how well the body responds to a vaccine. Vaccines build up protection in a child who is mildly ill as well as they do when the child is healthy.

## **Children taking antibiotics can get vaccines**

Antibiotics fight bacteria. Your child may need to take them for some mild illnesses, like strep throat and certain kinds of ear infections. Antibiotics will not affect how your child's body responds to vaccines. Children taking antibiotics for a mild illness should not delay vaccines.

Antiviral drugs fight viruses like flu. Antivirals might affect how your child's body responds to some vaccines. If your child is taking an antiviral drug, such as Tamiflu<sup>®</sup>, your doctor may wait to give certain vaccines.

## **Serious illness may affect the vaccines your child gets**

Children with moderate or serious illness—with or without fever—may need to wait until they are better to get some vaccines.

## **Your child may not receive some vaccines if he or she has:**

- A chronic health condition (like cancer)
- A weakened immune system (like if undergoing chemotherapy or is on certain medications after a transplant)
- Had a severe allergic reaction to a previous dose of vaccine or an ingredient in a vaccine

Reactions to a vaccine, such as fever, could make it harder to diagnose and treat a serious illness. And it's possible that signs of the illness could be mistaken for a reaction to the vaccine.

If your child has a serious illness or medical condition, talk to your child's doctor or nurse. They can help to determine which vaccines your child can and can not get at each visit and how to best protect your child's health.