

Understanding the childhood immunization schedule



BC Centre for Disease Control
Provincial Health Services Authority

Choosing to vaccinate your child is one of the best ways to keep them safe from vaccine-preventable diseases that can cause serious illness and even death.



This guide explains what the immunization schedule is, how it's made, and why it should be followed.

How vaccines work

The immune system is the body's defense system that protects against disease. Vaccines teach the immune system how to respond to disease-causing germs (bacteria and viruses). Vaccines are made of dead or weakened germs or pieces of germs, called antigens. Vaccine antigens teach children's bodies to recognize germs and fight them to prevent disease.

What is an immunization schedule and how is it made

Immunization schedules tell you which vaccines your child should get and when. In Canada, each province and territory uses recommendations from a national group of experts called the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) along with other factors to decide which vaccines should be publicly funded (provided free), who they should be offered to, and when. For this reason, schedules can vary between provinces and territories.

Other factors shaping immunization schedules include:

- How often and when certain diseases occur
- Who is most at risk of getting sick from the disease
- How serious a disease can be in certain groups
- How well vaccines work and for how long
- Vaccine safety
- Access to health care
- Available resources, including funding for vaccines

Some vaccines recommended by NACI may not be publicly funded in BC. Vaccines that are not publicly funded may be purchased at a local pharmacy, some doctor's offices, or travel clinics.



Talk to your health care provider or public health nurse about which vaccines are available and recommended for your child.

Why it's important to follow BC's immunization schedule

Following BC's immunization schedule gives your child the best protection when they need it most. Babies and young children are at greater risk from vaccine-preventable diseases because their immune systems are still developing. If you delay immunizing your child, it leaves them unprotected when they are most at risk of getting very sick and having serious complications from vaccine-preventable diseases.

For example, some diseases are especially dangerous for babies. If a baby gets Hepatitis B (a virus that attacks the liver), they are much more likely to have a lifelong infection than if an adult gets it. Hepatitis B can lead to serious long-term health problems, including cancer and death. There is no cure, but it can be prevented through immunization.



A closer look:

Why are Hepatitis B schedules different in different places?

NACI recommends that the timing of Hepatitis B immunization should be based on how common Hepatitis B is in each province or territory. BC regularly monitors Hepatitis B cases and updates its immunization program if needed.

This is why it is important to follow the immunization schedule for your province.

In Canada, Hepatitis B testing during pregnancy along with immunization programs for babies at higher risk have greatly reduced Hepatitis B infections.

To see BC's full immunization schedule:



Visit HealthLink BC by scanning the QR code



Call 8-1-1

Talk to your health care provider or public health nurse if you have any questions about vaccines for your child.

