

# Parent *pages*

RESOURCES FOR CHRISTIAN PARENTS IN THE 21ST CENTURY



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## Be Safe: Vaccinate

This time of year, pediatric clinics are busy setting up appointments for school physicals. For some, this is a time to get a health clearance to play school sports; for others it is screening for issues that could affect learning, such as hearing or vision problems. For many children, this is a time for vaccinations and booster shots.

At a home visit, I remember a parent telling me about his daughter's visit to the doctor for vaccinations. He told her that the shots were to help her be good in kindergarten, and, if she wasn't good, he would have to bring her back for another shot. Needless to say, this is NOT a good thing to tell your young student!

“As for you, O Lord, you will not restrain your mercy from me; your steadfast love and faithfulness will ever preserve me” (Psalm 40:11).

Vaccinations are a tool, a gift from God, to protect our children from potentially life-threatening disease. A short conversation with someone who was a parent before 1960 gives you a picture of the possible dangers each childhood fever could bring. It is a blessing to raise children without

the fear of polio or smallpox lurking in the air.

The Center for Disease Control publishes recommendations for immunization, which several medical organizations approve. When you look at your child's immunization record, the page is covered with acronyms. Here is a short explanation of each:

**Vaccinations are a tool, a gift from God, to protect our children from potentially life-threatening disease.**

- HepB – Hepatitis B, a serious liver infection.
- RV – Rotavirus, which can cause severe vomiting and diarrhea.
- DTaP – Diphtheria (D), an upper respiratory infection that affects the throat and heart, Tetanus (T), commonly found bacteria transmitted through a cut in the skin, causing muscle stiffness, and Pertussis (aP) an infection that causes violent coughing.
- Hib – Haemophilus influenzae type b, is a bacterial infection in young children that can cause pneumonia or meningitis.
- PCV – Pneumococcal bacteria — highly contagious and can lead to a number of serious complications.
- IPV – Polio, a virus that can lead to paralysis
- MMR – Measles (M), a respiratory infection with a rash, Mumps (M), a virus that leads to painful swelling in the salivary glands, and Rubella (R), a virus that causes a rash, which is especially dangerous to unborn children if the pregnant mother is infected.



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- V – Varicella (chickenpox), a viral infection with extremely itchy blisters.
- MCV4 – Meningococcal bacteria — can lead to meningitis, a serious infection in the covering of the brain and spinal cord.
- HPV – Human Papillomavirus is sexually transmitted and can cause genital warts or cancer.

Some of these vaccinations need only be given once for a lifetime of protection. Others, such as DTaP, MMR, V and IPV need booster shots to continue effectiveness. Even in adulthood, it is recommended that a tetanus booster be given every ten years.

There are three good reasons for vaccinating your children. First, these shots help keep your children safe. While some diseases are relatively rare, many, such as tetanus, are commonly found in your child's environment. Vaccinations can give your children's immune system a boost and reduce the number of days your children are sick, while protecting them from serious complications.

Second, vaccinating your healthy child can extend safety to others who may be unable to get shots due to illnesses or pregnancy. A week of an itchy rash for one child may mean a fatal blood infection for another or even brain damage for an unborn child.

Third, we should vaccinate our children in order to follow local regulations. When I applied for graduate school, I was asked if I was current on my MMR vaccinations. Even though I remembered having had all three of these diseases as a child, I had to demonstrate immunity through a blood test. These regulations may feel intrusive, but they are for the protection of all in the community. A serious illness



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can spread very quickly throughout a childcare facility, classroom, dorm, hospital, nursing home or locker room.

Vaccinations have been thoroughly tested and found to be very safe. Several years ago, one study seemed to indicate a connection between the MMR vaccine and autism. However, this study has never been replicated and has since been found to have been fabricated by the researchers. Some early symptoms of autism first become evident in young children around the time of the MMR vaccine; however, that is due to the development of the child and not to the vaccine.

The newest and most controversial vaccination is the HPV, given to

protect against a particular sexually transmitted disease. A vaccination is not a replacement for teaching your child about God's will for his or her sexual experiences. We expect God's word and Spirit to strengthen our child in making such decisions. However, our children are growing up in world full of many people who do not follow God's teaching. This vaccine can offer protection from disease transmitted through unwanted contact.

Vaccinations do not provide 100 percent effectiveness, and some can weaken over the years. In comparison, God's love and faithfulness are a complete and dependable protection. When you make those clinic appointments for booster shots, don't forget to surround your child with prayer.

### For further study:

This FamilyDoctor.org site can give further explanation of vaccinations and the diseases they prevent. <http://tinyurl.com/6qlgzvg>

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