

Back-to-School Vaccines: Tips for protecting your child and your community

By Sheldon Riklon, M.D.

Vaccinations are a safe way to protect children from serious diseases and prevent outbreaks in schools. As the new school year approaches, it's important to make sure children are up to date with their shots for their health and the well-being of the community.

Vaccinated children help protect others by stopping the spread of contagious illnesses. In fact, many schools require proof of vaccinations to keep everyone safe and healthy.

Here are some steps that parents can take to make sure their children are vaccinated:

- **Check Records:** Look at your child's vaccination records. Talk to your child's doctor or the Arkansas Department of Health to make sure all necessary vaccines have been given.
- **Know the Rules:** Learn what vaccines your state requires for school. Contact the Arkansas Department of Health for more information about required vaccines.
- **Talk to the School:** Give the school your child's updated vaccination records and any medical exemptions.
- **Ask Questions:** If you have concerns or questions about vaccines, talk to your child's doctor. They can provide you with the information you need.

Recommended Vaccines for School-Aged Children:

Hepatitis B	Protects against a serious liver infection. It is available for all age groups .
HPV	Prevents certain cancers and genital warts. It is recommended for boys and girls starting at ages 11-12 .
Meningococcal	Protects against bacterial meningitis — a serious, and sometimes deadly, infection. Recommended for children ages 10 and older .
MMR (Measles, Mumps, Rubella)	Prevents three highly contagious diseases. It is recommended that children get their first dose at 12-15 months .
Polio (IPV)	Protects against polio, which can cause paralysis. Children can get their first dose at 6 weeks .
Tdap (Diphtheria, Tetanus, Pertussis)	Protects against three serious bacterial infections. Recommended for children 10 years of age and older .
Varicella (Chickenpox)	Prevents chickenpox, which can cause severe complications. It is recommended that children get their first dose at 12-15 months .

COVID-19	The CDC recommends COVID-19 vaccinations and boosters for eligible children aged 6 months and older .
Flu	A yearly flu shot is recommended for all children aged 6 months and older .

Keeping your child’s vaccines up to date is crucial for their health and for maintaining a safe school environment. By understanding the importance of vaccines, keeping track of vaccination schedules, and talking to your health care provider about any concerns, you can help protect your child and your community from preventable diseases.

For more information about required vaccines for schoolchildren in Arkansas, visit the Arkansas Department of Health’s website at healthy.arkansas.gov.

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