

Frequently Asked Questions: Immunizing Your Child

WHAT IS THIMEROSAL? IS IT SAFE?

Thimerosal is used in some vaccines and other medicines, including contact lens solutions, throat, and nose sprays. It stops bacteria and fungi from getting into vaccines, especially open multi-dose vaccine containers. Thimerosal has a small amount of organic mercury in it. Some parents and others worry about a link between neurologic disorders and vaccines that use thimerosal. No scientific data has shown a link between thimerosal and any childhood disorder. No one has shown that small amounts of thimerosal in vaccines cause harm, except for minor [side effects](#) like swelling and redness where the vaccine was given.

In 1999, the Public Health Service and the AAP recommended that thimerosal be taken out of vaccines as a precaution. There is no evidence that thimerosal in vaccines is harmful, but children are exposed to different forms of [mercury](#) in the environment, such as in some fish. We can't always remove the mercury from the environment, but we can control the mercury used in vaccines. So, by taking thimerosal out of vaccines, we lessen the amount of mercury a child will be exposed to early in life. Since 2001, all routinely recommended children's vaccines being made in the US (except some influenza and Td vaccines) contain no thimerosal or only trace amounts.

Many childhood vaccines never used thimerosal: measles/mumps/rubella (MMR), polio (IPV), varicella/chicken pox, some Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib), and some diphtheria/tetanus/pertussis (DTaP). Some vaccines are only available with thimerosal, such as meningococcal vaccine, but they are NOT recommended for very young children. For additional information about thimerosal in vaccines, [click here](#).

WHY DO WE GIVE OUR CHILDREN SO MANY SHOTS? IS IT SAFE TO GIVE MULTIPLE VACCINES IN ONE VISIT?

Vaccines are the best way to prevent diseases, which can cause pneumonia, meningitis, and even death. Children are given vaccines at a young age because this is when they are most likely to get the disease. If a child is not vaccinated and is exposed to a disease, the child's body may not be strong enough to fight the disease. But an infant's body can handle the small number of weakened and killed viruses in vaccines.



The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the AAP recommend vaccination against 12 diseases. Because children need some of these vaccines more than once, children may receive up to 23 shots by the time they are 2 years old. A child may receive up to 6 shots during one visit to the doctor.

Even though today children receive many shots, they are exposed to smaller doses of the killed or weakened virus in vaccines. Studies show that it is safe to give a child multiple vaccinations in one visit. The vaccines work just as well, and it does not increase the risk of side effects. The scientific data show that receiving multiple vaccines has no harmful effect on a normal child's immune system. For more information, click on "Vaccine Safety" on the [CISP Web site](#). To learn more about how you can comfort your baby while s/he is being immunized, [click here](#).

Got a question? Email us at cispimmunize@aap.org

