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Getting a vaccine

[TN]: There are two logos at the top of this page: on the left is Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa New Zealand Government; on the right is Te Whatu Ora Health New Zealand.

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# Getting a vaccine

## What is a vaccine

Inside your body, your immune system helps fight against diseases caused by viruses and bacteria. Sometimes, though, your immune system needs a little help. Vaccines give your immune system instructions on how to defend itself better so your body will have the right tools for the job, meaning you're less likely to get sick.

## When to get a vaccine

In Aotearoa New Zealand we have a National Immunisation Schedule. This sets out the free vaccines offered to babies, tamariki, teenagers and adults at certain times in their life.

### Why vaccines are recommended at certain times

The schedule is deliberately spaced to boost your immunity. Each vaccination on the schedule is timed for the best immune response and protection. For the best protection against disease, immunise your at the recommended times. Not getting immunised on time puts you, or your tamariki, at greater risk of getting a serious disease.

### If an immunisation has been missed—you can catch up

Sometimes life gets busy and things get in the way, which means you miss a scheduled vaccination.

Although getting immunised on time is recommended for the best protection, it's easy to catch up.

Catch-up immunisations are free for all tamariki under 18 years old. Lots of catch-up adult immunisations are also free.

Just contact your doctor, nurse, or healthcare provider and make a plan.

### How to check if a vaccination has been missed

To find out if you, or your tamariki, have had all their immunisations, or if there are some to catch up on, you can:

* check your Well Child Tamariki Ora My Health Book (previously called Plunket Book), or
* phone and talk to your doctor, nurse, or healthcare provider.

Lots of adults do not have their Plunket Books anymore and often individual vaccinations were not recorded. So to check whether you've been vaccinated, contact your doctor, nurse, or healthcare provider.

If you're not able to confirm an immunisation was given, your doctor, nurse, or healthcare provider may advise you to play it safe and get immunised anyway. It's better to be vaccinated and protected.

## Lots of vaccines are free

* For children under 18, all vaccinations on the National Immunisation Schedule are free—it does not matter what their visa or citizenship status is. This includes visitors to Aotearoa New Zealand.
* Lots of vaccines are also free for adults, including measles. Some you have to pay for if you do not meet certain criteria.
* If you're pregnant, the whooping cough and flu vaccines are free.

You may need to pay for [extra vaccines](https://www.immunise.health.nz/when-to-immunise/extra-immunisations-for-tamariki-and-whanau/) that are not on the schedule (like travel vaccines). Check with your doctor, nurse, or healthcare provider when booking an immunisation if there is a cost.

## How to book a vaccination

### Through your usual doctor, nurse, or healthcare provider

Call your usual doctor, nurse, or healthcare provider to make a vaccination appointment. Plan at least 1 to 2 weeks ahead so you can get a time and date that works best for you and your whānau.

If you're unable to call, check your health provider's website for other options to make an appointment.

When you get in touch, ask for a vaccination appointment for either yourself or your child. You'll need to provide the name and date of birth of the person being immunised. The provider will know what immunisations are needed as they can look this up on the National Immunisation Register. While you're on the phone, it's a good time to check your contact details are up to date.

### Pharmacy immunisations

Adults, older children, and teenagers may be able to get some vaccinations at pharmacies including:

* flu
* measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR)
* HPV
* chickenpox
* tetanus, diphtheria, whooping cough (Boostrix)
* meningococcal
* COVID-19.

Contact your local pharmacy to see what immunisations they offer and if you need to book an appointment. Before booking, check to see if there is a cost involved.

Healthpoint has a list of pharmacies in your area and their contact details.

### If you need extra support

When you make an appointment, make sure you let the team know if you, or your tamariki, might need some extra help.

They may be able to help by:

* providing a space away from other people
* supporting you with other tamariki you bring to the appointment
* accessibility arrangements and mobility assistance
* arranging for a home visit (this may be through another health service).

### Chat to the disability team

We have a dedicated disability team you can call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

* Call 0800 11 12 13 (24 hours, every day)
* Text 8988 for free
* Email: access@whakarongorau.nz

A person with experience or knowledge of disability will answer your call from 8am to 8pm. After 8pm, calls are answered by a trained member of the Healthline team.

You can ask them questions about:

* accessibility at different vaccination sites
* getting vaccinations safely
* home vaccinations for you or your tamariki.

## Planning for the appointment

You'll need at least 30 to 45 minutes for the whole immunisation appointment (this includes 20 minutes of waiting time after the vaccination). Allow a little longer if you're bringing more than 1 child, or other whānau, for immunisation.

If you have a Well Child Tamariki Ora My Health Book, bring it along to the appointment so the vaccinator can update the immunisation history. Do not worry if you do not have this, immunisations are also recorded in the National Immunisation Register.

From 15 months old, your vaccinator can also provide an immunisation certificate if you need to show your early childhood centre or school that your child has been immunised.

You do not need to bring ID to the appointment.

### Changing an appointment

If need to change your appointment time, call to let them know as soon as possible. This allows you to make a new appointment time that works better for you, and your previous appointment can be given to someone else.

### If you're unwell on the day of the appointment

Contact your health provider. They will be able to advise if the vaccination should still be given.

If you have COVID-19 you will need to reschedule.

### Tips that may help you, and your tamariki, feel more comfortable

* Choose clothes that can be removed or rolled up to make the injection easier. Babies under 12 months have all their injections in the thigh. From 1 year, tamariki have their injections in the arm or thigh.
* Bring any kai or drink you'll need during this time.
* Bring your child's favourite toy, blanket, game, or book along as a distraction and to keep them busy afterwards.
* If you're nervous, bring a whānau member or friend for support.

## At the appointment

Your vaccinator will talk to you about the immunisation and what to expect afterwards. There will be time to ask questions and you will be asked if you're happy to go ahead with the immunisation. In some situations you might need to sign a piece of paper to show you agree to the immunisation.

### Tips for pēpi and tamariki immunisations

* Talking, cuddling, and holding your tamariki will help distract them from the injection and soothe them afterwards if they're upset.
* Try to stay calm. Babies and children can tell when their parents are feeling anxious.
* Feeding your baby (including breast or bottle feeding) while they're being immunised may help them feel more comfortable.

### If you're scared of needles

Let the vaccinator know if you or your child is scared of needles. They're trained to make you as comfortable as possible. They can provide distractions and techniques to help reduce pain and anxiety.

## After the immunisation

You'll be asked to wait up to 20 minutes after the vaccination to make sure you and your tamariki are feeling OK.

Some people experience mild reactions after immunisation. They may develop a fever or experience tenderness, swelling and redness where the injection was given. This is the body's normal response to immunisation and shows the vaccine is working. Symptoms usually settle after a day or two. If you do not experience any side effects that's OK too, the vaccine is still working.

If you're concerned about any reactions after their immunisation, contact your doctor or nurse. You can also call Healthline any time on 0800 611 116.

**End of Getting a Vaccine**