

## Put vaccinations on your family back-to-school list

By Teddi Nicolaus

**K**eeping your child healthy and safe is every parent's top concern. You make sure their car seat is safe, their bicycle helmet fits properly and that they eat healthy foods. And you always ensure they're up-to-date on their school vaccinations.

Schools require your child to be vaccinated to protect them from a long list of diseases. When lots of kids come together, they are more likely to spread germs and get sick. Fortunately, vaccines are "a safe and extremely effective way to protect your child," Ryan Padrez, MD, a pediatrician at Stanford Medicine Children's Health, says.

"In the classroom setting, germs that cause vaccine-preventable diseases can spread quickly among children," says Padrez, who is also a clinical associate professor of pediatrics at Stanford University School of Medicine. "Ensuring all children are properly vaccinated helps guard against these germs and prevents outbreaks in communities."

Most states require that your kids be vaccinated against polio, chickenpox, measles, whooping cough and a host of other icky diseases before starting school. To learn exactly what your child needs, call the school directly or check with your child's pediatrician, state health department or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website.

Current guidelines suggest that children

receive about 14 vaccines before they start kindergarten. But your child will need boosters and other vaccines throughout childhood.

"Sometimes more than one dose of a vaccine is required to build complete or close to complete immunity," Padrez says. "Other times immunity starts to wear off over time and so a booster dose is needed."

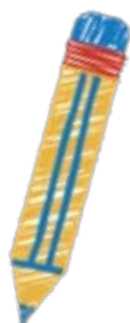
Even though you do your best to keep up with life's many demands, there's still the occasional missed soccer practice or forgotten visit to the hair stylist. But when it comes to your child's vaccines, there's little room for error. Don't wait to vaccinate.

### Keep your records straight

Vaccine records are important. Your child will likely be required to show their vaccination information as they move through different schools, summer camps and other activities. Lost records can usually be retrieved by your child's physician or from your state's immunization registry, even if the vaccines were given at a different office location. However, be aware that the process of requesting records can vary across states and might take time to complete.

If you fall behind on the recommended vaccine schedule, keep in mind that each vaccine has a unique catch-up schedule. If your child is behind, you can work with your child's health care team to develop the right catch-up plan.

Vaccination costs are covered by most health insurance plans at little or no cost to you. If you don't have health insurance, you may be able to get vaccines through the federally funded Vaccines for Children Program, which provides recommended vaccines at no cost for children younger than 19 who meet certain requirements. Your state health department can also provide information about free and low-cost vaccines.



>> For more on child vaccination schedules, see [www.cdc.gov/vaccines](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines)

"The bottom line is that vaccines are the safest way to protect you and your child from serious illnesses," Padrez says.

### Vax before heading to campus

When your child gets older and heads off to college, keep vaccinations in mind. Along with the flip flops, shower tote and laundry basket, make sure to pack their immunization records.

"School-entry vaccine requirements provide an important layer of protection for college students," says Sharon McMullen, RN, MPH, FACHS, co-chair of the American College Health Association's Vaccine Preventable Diseases Committee.

In addition to reducing the risk of outbreaks on campus, vaccinations against diseases such as flu and mumps can keep your child from missing out on a week or more of important academic and social activities at college. Many colleges also require that students have received their hepatitis B and meningococcal vaccines.

"Campus buildings such as classrooms, labs, gyms, dining halls and dorms can get very crowded," McMullen says. "Most vaccine-preventable diseases are spread through close contact with others, so it's important for all members of the campus community to be protected."



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