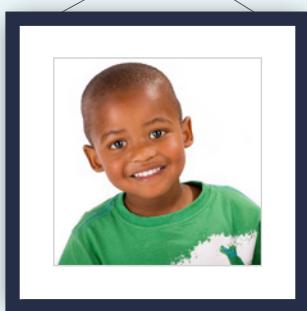
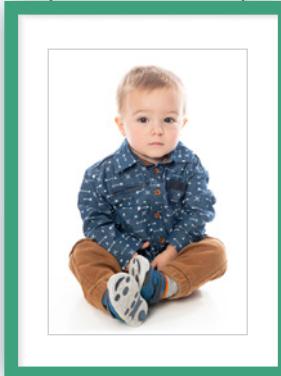
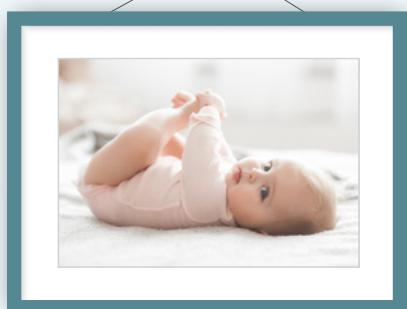




Immunise, protect, thrive



Because every child deserves the strongest start

Vaccination protects your child from serious diseases

Vaccination is the most important thing you can do to protect your child against ill health.

After clean water, vaccinations are the most effective public health intervention in the world for saving lives, promoting good health and preventing serious illness.

The World Health Organization (WHO) states 4-5 million childhood deaths are prevented through childhood vaccination every year. Vaccination also helps children avoid serious health complications.

Always seek credible information regarding your child or your own health by speaking to your pharmacy team, health visitor, school nurse or GP.

Why is childhood immunisation so important?

Immunisation is the protection you can't see but is as essential as car seats, bicycle helmets and stair gates.

Vaccination is the safest and most effective way to prevent disease and save lives. Vaccines help prevent more than 20 deadly diseases, such as diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, influenza and measles. These vaccines help people of all ages in Northern Ireland to live longer, healthier lives.

Since vaccines were introduced in the UK, diseases like smallpox, polio and tetanus that used to kill or disable millions of people are either gone or seen very rarely. If people stopped getting vaccinated infectious diseases could quickly spread again. This would be devastating.

Some infectious diseases can kill children or cause lasting damage to their health. Your child's immune system needs help to fight those diseases, and immunisation provides this support.

Young babies are particularly vulnerable to infections, which is why they need to be protected early, from 8 weeks of age. By getting your child vaccinated you are helping protect those who aren't yet eligible for vaccination, such as tiny babies.

What can happen if I decide not to vaccinate my child?

Due to the high number of children receiving vaccinations in Northern Ireland over the past couple of decades, many serious childhood infectious diseases are rarely heard of.

Recently, however, vaccination rates have seen a slight decrease. It is crucial vaccine uptake remains high in Northern Ireland to prevent many of these serious diseases returning from parts of the world where they still occur. If this happens, children living in Northern Ireland who are not vaccinated will be at risk of these infections and potentially life-changing complications, even death.

What is a vaccine and how does it work?

Vaccines prevent disease. They train your body's immune system to make antibodies, which are proteins that help fight infection, just as it does naturally when it's exposed to a disease. If you are re-exposed to the disease in the future, your immune system 'remembers' the disease and quickly destroys it before you become unwell. Most vaccines are given by an injection, but some are given orally (by mouth) or sprayed into the nose.

Immunise, protect, thrive.

Vaccination is the safest and most effective way to protect your child against serious diseases. Your child will need a number of different vaccines to be fully protected as they go from birth onwards.

The Public Health Agency (PHA) strongly recommends babies and children receive all their vaccinations according to the routine childhood immunisation programme. A pull-out section overleaf shows when your child will receive vaccination against a number of serious diseases.

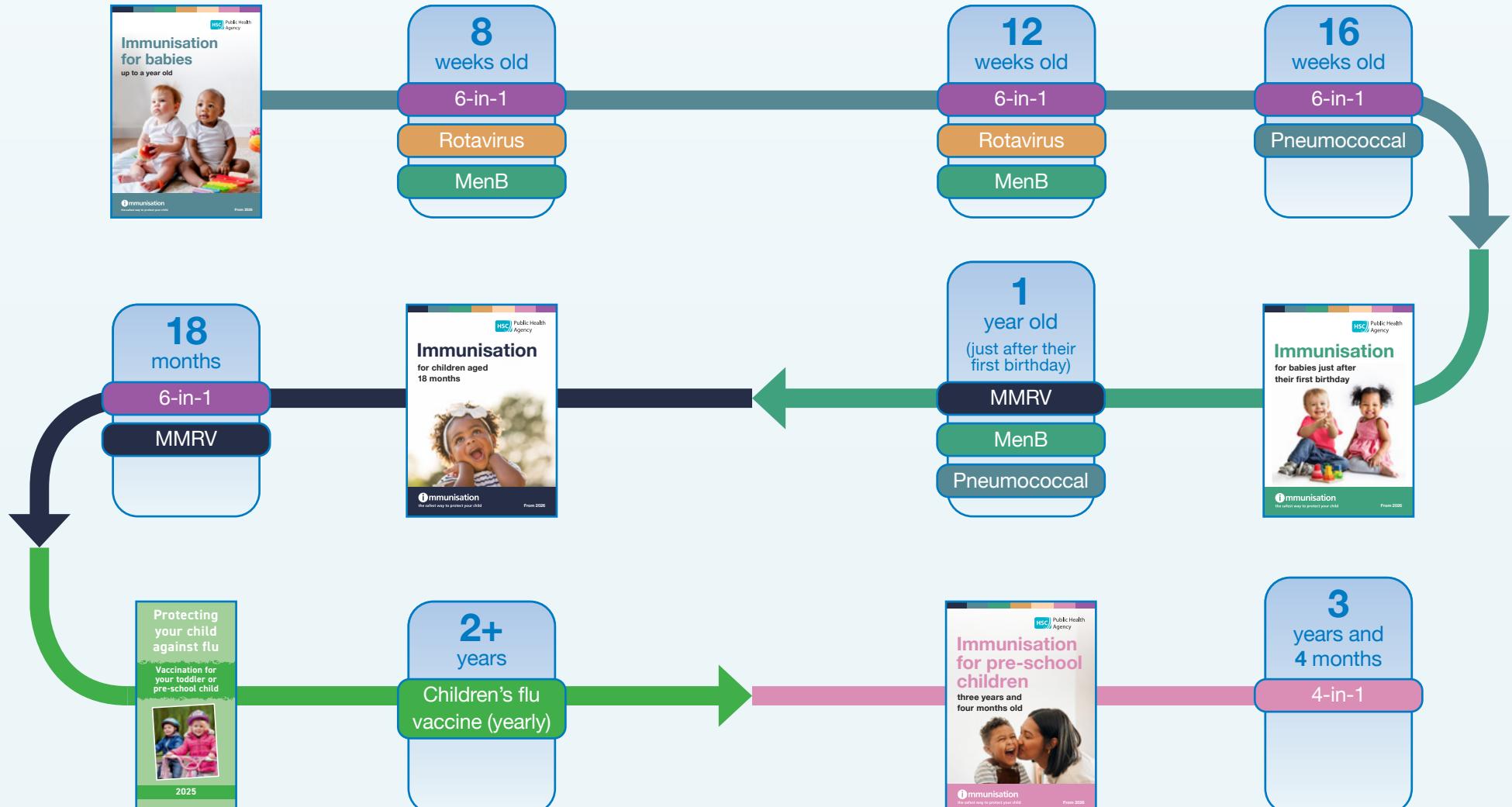
The best way to ensure your child's vaccinations are up to date is by checking their Red Book or speaking to your health visitor. If you think your child has missed a vaccination, contact your GP practice to book an appointment as soon as possible to make sure they have maximum protection against disease. For more information visit:

www.pha.site/CheckTheirRedBook

Routine childhood vaccination schedule



This schedule will be slightly different for babies born before 31 December 2024. Scan the QR code or visit nidirect.gov.uk/childhood-immunisation for more information.



6-in-1
protects against diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (whooping cough), polio, Hib and hepatitis B

4-in-1
protects against diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (whooping cough) and polio

Perfect timing

The childhood immunisation schedule has been updated to reflect better timing of vaccines for the best protection. Getting your child vaccinated at the right time means they will have the best protection when they need it most.

Successful vaccination programmes result in better control of infectious diseases and a reduction in the numbers of children being unwell and needing hospital treatment.



The strongest start just got stronger

After expert scientific advice, the childhood immunisation schedule has been enhanced with the varicella (chickenpox) vaccine which will bring both added health benefits and practical advantages for families.

From 1 January 2026, GP practices will offer eligible children a combined vaccine for measles, mumps, rubella and varicella (MMRV) as part of the routine infant vaccination schedule.

This vaccine will help reduce cases of chickenpox and protect children from serious complications that can cause hospitalisation, such as bacterial infections including strep A, brain and lung inflammation.

Children will be significantly less likely to miss days in nursery and school, and parents will not need to take time off work to care for them. The chickenpox vaccine has been safely used for many years and has been part of routine immunisation schedules in other countries, including the United States, Canada, Australia and Germany.

Vaccine safety

All vaccines go through extensive trials and testing to make sure they are safe for you or your child. A vaccine can only be approved once it has been rigorously tested. Once approved for use in the UK, it will continue to be monitored for any possible side effects by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA). It is reassuring to know the safety standards of vaccines have to be higher than those for medication to treat illnesses, and the UK has some of the highest safety standards in the world.

Vaccines do not overload or weaken the immune system.
It is safe to give children several vaccines at a time.

Don't forget teenagers

As your child gets older they need protection from additional infections, before the risk of exposure increases.

They will need protection from the human papillomavirus (HPV). There are over 100 types of HPV but 13 of these are known to cause a number of cancers (cervical, some mouth and throat cancers and some cancers of the anus and genitals). If vaccination is given before being exposed to the virus, when a child is 12-13 years old, it offers the best protection. For more on HPV vaccination go to: www.nidirect.gov.uk/hpv-vaccine

Teenagers also need protection from meningococcal bacteria. When they are between 14–18 years a single dose of the MenACWY vaccine will help protect them from the most common meningococcal strains in Northern Ireland. They will receive a booster vaccine to extend their protection against tetanus, diphtheria and polio at the same time.



The routine childhood immunisation programme started in the 1940s and has expanded significantly since then with new vaccines being added based on expert scientific evidence, safety and effectiveness.

Not only does the immunisation programme protect individual children from potentially fatal infections and life-changing complications, it also safeguards those who are too young to be vaccinated yet. It is essential uptake remains high to prevent these serious diseases from returning.



www.nidirect.gov.uk/childhood-immunisation



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