



Charlie Crist  
Governor

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State Surgeon General

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**PINELLAS COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT**

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## *Immunization Awareness Month*

# **The Importance of Immunizations**

Preventing disease is a key to health. It is always better to prevent a disease than to treat it. Vaccines prevent disease in the people who receive them and protect those who are exposed to people who have not been vaccinated. Vaccines help prevent infectious diseases and save lives. Vaccines are responsible for the control of many diseases that were once common in this country, including polio, measles, diphtheria, pertussis (whooping cough), rubella (German measles), mumps, tetanus and Haemophilus influenzae type B (Hib). Vaccine-preventable diseases have a costly impact, resulting in doctor's visits, hospitalizations and premature deaths.

Parents are naturally concerned about their children's health and safety, and they take many steps to protect them. These steps range from childproof door latches to child safety seats. In the same way, vaccines work to protect infants, children and adults from illnesses and death caused by infectious diseases. While the U.S. currently has record, or near record, low cases of vaccine-preventable diseases, the viruses and bacteria that cause them still exist. Diseases that have been eliminated in this country, such as polio, are only a plane ride away. Polio and other infectious diseases can be passed on to people who are not protected by vaccines.

### **Why Are Childhood Vaccines So Important?**

Newborn babies are immune to many diseases because they have antibodies they got from their mothers. However, the duration of this immunity may last only a month to about a year. Further, young children do not have maternal immunity against some vaccine-preventable diseases, such as whooping cough.

If a child is not vaccinated and is exposed to a disease germ, the child's body may not be strong enough to fight the disease. Before vaccines, many children died from diseases that vaccines now prevent, such as whooping cough, measles and polio. Those same germs exist today, but babies are now protected by vaccines, so we do not see these diseases as often.

Immunizing individual children also helps to protect the health of our community, especially those people who are not immunized. People who are not immunized include those who are too young to be vaccinated (for example, children less than a year old cannot receive the measles vaccine but can be infected by the measles virus), those who cannot be vaccinated for medical reasons (e.g., children with leukemia) and those who do not have an adequate response to vaccination.

**(MORE)**

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This also protects people who received a vaccine, but who have not developed immunity. In addition, people who are sick will be less likely to be exposed to disease germs that can be passed around by unvaccinated children. Immunization also slows down or stops disease outbreaks.

**CDC Recommendations for Teens and Pre-Teens**

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has launched a pre-teen vaccine campaign, recommending that all 11 and 12-year olds receive the meningococcal and T-dap vaccines. The meningococcal vaccine protects against meningitis and its complications. The T-dap vaccine is a booster against tetanus and diphtheria, and protects against pertussis (whooping cough). The CDC also recommends all girls, ages 11 and 12, receive the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccine, which can protect against the most common types of cervical cancer.

CDC immunization schedules list the ages for each vaccine or series of shots. Visit [www.ImmunizeFlorida.org](http://www.ImmunizeFlorida.org) to print out a chart to keep track of these shots. Children are particularly vulnerable to infection, so most vaccines are given during the first five to six years of life. Some immunizations, including boosters, are recommended throughout adolescent and adult years, while special vaccines may be administered to international travelers.

Children should receive vaccines against diphtheria, influenza, tetanus, pertussis, measles, mumps, rubella, chickenpox and polio. Adolescents need vaccinations for influenza, hepatitis A and B and meningococcal disease. Adult vaccines include influenza, pneumococcal disease, tetanus and diphtheria. If any shots are past due, consult the catch-up schedule and ask a doctor about getting back on track.

**For information about immunizations, contact your doctor or the Pinellas County Health Department.**

[www.PinellasHealth.com](http://www.PinellasHealth.com)

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