

# Healthy choices, healthy children

## If you choose not to vaccinate your child, understand the risks and responsibilities.

If your child is not immunized, the following information can help you protect your child, your family and others.

### **Any time that your child is ill, inform health care providers that your child has not been fully vaccinated if you:**

- visit your child's health care provider or any clinic
- call 911
- ride in an ambulance
- visit a hospital emergency room

Keep a vaccination record easily accessible, so that you can report exactly which vaccines your child has received.

### **Telling health care providers about your child's vaccination status is important for two reasons:**

1. The health care providers will need to consider the possibility that your child has a vaccine-preventable disease, so they can treat your child correctly and as quickly as possible.
2. The health care providers can take simple precautions to prevent a contagious disease from spreading to others.

### **When there is an outbreak of a vaccine-preventable disease in your community**

- Unvaccinated children and their families may have to be isolated or quarantined during disease outbreaks.
- Unless your child has a medical condition that prevents them from getting immunized, it may not be too late to get protection by getting vaccinated. Ask your health care provider if your child can still receive a vaccination.
- If there are cases (or even a single case) of a vaccine-preventable disease in your community, you may be asked to take your child out of school, daycare or other activities, such as playgroups or sports. You will be informed when it is safe for your child to return. Be prepared to keep your child home for several days, or up to several weeks.
- Learn about the disease and how it is spread. It may not be possible to avoid being exposed to it. For example, measles is so contagious that even after an infected person has left a room, the virus remains on surfaces and in the air for up to two hours. An unvaccinated person could get measles just by entering that room.
- Each disease is different, so talk with your child's health care provider to help you understand when your child is no longer at risk of getting the disease.

## If you know your child is exposed to a vaccine-preventable disease for which they have not been vaccinated

- Learn the early signs of the disease.
- Get medical help quickly if your child or any family members develop early signs of the disease.
- Be sure to call ahead to let your health care provider know that you suspect your child may have a vaccine-preventable disease. This way, medical staff can take simple precautions to prevent the disease from spreading to others.
- Follow recommendations to isolate your child from others, including family members (especially babies, pregnant individuals and people with weak immune systems), by staying at home; contact your local public health unit for important additional guidance. Most vaccine-preventable diseases can be very dangerous to babies who are too young to be fully vaccinated (less than 12 months old), or children who are not vaccinated due to certain medical conditions.
- For some vaccine-preventable diseases, there are medicines available to treat infected people, as well as medicines to keep people they come in contact with from getting the disease.

## School-aged children



**Children who attend school in Ontario must have proof of immunization against certain diseases, unless a valid exemption is provided. As a parent, it is your responsibility to report your child's immunization status to your local public health unit; your health care provider does not send this information for you.**

**Children who are exempt from immunization are at increased risk and may be removed from school during a disease outbreak.**

## Did you know?

### Many vaccine-preventable diseases have no treatment or cure.

These diseases can range from mild to severe. For example, people who get chickenpox are at risk for complications such as pneumonia (a lung infection), bleeding problems, encephalitis (swelling of the brain) and skin infections. In most cases, there is no way to know ahead of time if a child will get a mild or serious case.

### Your child can catch diseases from people who do not have any symptoms.

For example, Hib meningitis can be spread from people who have the bacteria in their body but are not sick. You can't tell who is contagious.



## Before you travel with your child

- Review the Government of Canada website [travel.gc.ca/travelling/health-safety](https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/health-safety) before travelling to learn about possible disease risks, and vaccines that will protect your family.
- If an unimmunized person develops a vaccine-preventable disease while travelling, to prevent transmission to others, they should not travel by plane, train or bus until a health care provider determines the person is no longer contagious.

## Plan ahead!



- › **Talk to your health care provider about your child's immunization status. Health care providers care about the health of your children.**
- › **Learn about vaccine-preventable diseases and how they spread.**
- › **Know what you can do to protect your child if there is an outbreak in your community.**

## Stay up to date with your children's vaccinations.

It's important to make sure that you and your family are protected against disease.

For more information on immunization, please contact your health care provider and visit [ontario.ca/vaccines](https://ontario.ca/vaccines).