

WELL BALANCED

- AUGUST 2026 -

National Immunization Awareness Month

MAKING *Informed Choices*



August is National Immunization Awareness Month—a time to explore reliable, evidence-based information and have thoughtful conversations about vaccines and health. Staying informed can build confidence in your personal health decisions, especially since questions and uncertainty about immunizations are common.

Understanding Key Immunization Terms

The following terms are closely related, but they do not mean the same thing. Understanding the difference between a vaccine, vaccination, and immunization can make health information easier to follow and support more informed decisions.

- **Vaccine:** A product made from very small amounts of weakened or dead germs (such as viruses or bacteria) that helps the immune system build protection against a specific disease.
- **Vaccination:** The act of receiving a vaccine, usually through a shot.
- **Immunization:** The process of becoming protected against a disease, often through vaccination.

What to Know About Vaccine Safety

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, every authorized vaccine goes through a lengthy safety testing process. Before vaccines are recommended for public use, they are tested in laboratories, which can take years.

Clinical trials involve volunteers who receive the vaccine. Early clinical trials usually begin with 20-100 volunteers, while later trials may include thousands of participants. These studies are designed to answer important questions such as:

- Is the vaccine safe?
- What dose works best?
- How does the immune system respond to the vaccine?

Even after vaccines are approved or authorized, they continue to be tested for safety and quality. They are monitored for potency (that they work as intended), purity (that substances used during production have been removed), and sterility (that they are free from outside germs).

Once vaccines are recommended for public use, the Food and Drug Administration, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and other federal agencies monitor vaccine safety on an ongoing basis.



Did You Know?

Vaccines do not cause disease. They contain killed or weakened viruses, making it impossible for vaccines to give you the diseases they are designed to prevent, according to the National Foundation of Infectious Diseases.

Understanding Possible Side Effects

According to experts, most vaccine side effects are mild and not serious. The most common side effect is soreness where the vaccine was given. Other common side effects may include:

- Swelling or redness at the injection site
- Mild fever
- Chills
- Tiredness
- Headache
- Muscle or joint aches.

These side effects are usually a sign that the body is beginning to build immunity. Serious side effects are rare. If a severe reaction after vaccination occurs, call 911 or seek immediate medical care at the nearest hospital.

Tips to Make Informed Decisions

Before making a decision about vaccination, it is important to consider your individual health needs. Vaccine recommendations may vary based on factors such as age, medical history, and lifestyle. Discussing your questions and concerns with your health care provider can help you make informed decisions that are best for you. Here are some tips to consider:

- Know your health history and share important information with your provider, including:
 - Any allergies you may have
 - Any serious side effects you have experienced from vaccines in the past



Did You Know?

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), a group of medical and public health experts, develops vaccination recommendations.

- Whether you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant
- Whether you are currently feeling sick.

- Ask questions that are important to you. Consider writing down your questions and concerns before your appointment. Examples may include:
 - Is this vaccine appropriate for my health history?
 - What are the common side effects?
 - Are there any risks I should consider?
 - How was the vaccine tested, and how is safety monitored?
- Use reliable, evidence-based sources when doing your own research about vaccines.

Making decisions about your health is personal, and staying informed is an important part of that process. Taking the time to learn about vaccines, ask questions, and discuss concerns with a trusted health care provider can help you make choices that align with your individual needs and values.

Resources

- » National Immunization Awareness Month ([cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov/niaam/))

Sources

- » <https://www.nfid.org/immunization/10-reasons-to-get-vaccinated/>
- » <https://www.hhs.gov/immunization/index.html>
- » <https://www.hhs.gov/immunization/basics/index.html>
- » <https://www.hhs.gov/immunization/basics/safety/index.html>
- » <https://www.hhs.gov/immunization/basics/safety/side-effects/index.html>

