

# Chapter 4: Immunisation

## Childhood Immunisation

Preventing an illness is preferable to treating it once it has developed. There are now many safe and effective vaccines against many serious and deadly illnesses, e.g. polio and tetanus. Some vaccines are given routinely to all the population, others only to individuals thought to be at high risk of certain infections. Immunisation involves giving a person a killed germ, a live but weakened germ or just a critical part of the germ. This induces activation of the immune system and results in immunity to that specific germ. The principle of immunisation is simple: it gives the body a memory of infection without the risk of natural infection.

The incidence of many of the common infectious diseases of childhood would be further reduced if all children entering school were appropriately immunised. However, there are a very small number of children in whom specific immunisations are truly contraindicated. Immunisation of all suitable children would ultimately reduce the number of infected children in the community and thus reduce the likelihood of a susceptible child being exposed to infection.

## Immunisation Schedule

In 2008 there was a major change to the childhood immunisation schedule for children born on or after 1<sup>st</sup> July 2008. The main changes were the introduction of two additional vaccines, pneumococcal vaccine and hepatitis B vaccine. Children born before that date would not have routinely received either pneumococcal or hepatitis B vaccines. Parents should be encouraged to ensure that their children receive all immunisations at the appropriate age, as shown in Table 4.1 below. This includes children who come to live in Ireland from another country.

It is also very important that pupils going on work experience or school trips abroad should be appropriately vaccinated, especially if they will be working or interacting with young children or other vulnerable groups.

Table 4.1 Current Irish Childhood Immunisation Schedule, 2013

Age	Immunisations	Where available
<b>Preschool</b>		
Birth	BCG	Hospital or HSE Clinic
2 months	6 in 1 + PCV	GP Surgery
4 months	6 in 1 + MenC	GP Surgery
6 months	6 in 1 + PCV + MenC	GP Surgery
12 months	MMR + PCV	GP Surgery
13 months	MenC + Hib	GP Surgery
<b>School</b>		
4 to 5 years (Junior Infants)	4 in 1 + MMR	HSE School Immunisation Services/GP Surgery*
12 -13 years (girls only) (1 <sup>st</sup> year second level school)	HPV x 3 doses	HSE School Immunisation Services
12 -13 years (1 <sup>st</sup> year second level school)	Tdap	HSE School Immunisation Services

BCG	Bacille Calmette Guerin (TB) vaccine
6 in 1	Diphtheria, Haemophilus influenza b, Hepatitis B, Pertussis (whooping cough), Polio and Tetanus vaccine
PCV	Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine
MenC	Meningococcal C vaccine
MMR	Measles, Mumps and Rubella vaccine
4 in 1	Diphtheria, Pertussis (whooping cough), Polio and Tetanus vaccine
HPV	Human Papillomavirus vaccine
Tdap	Tetanus, low dose diphtheria and low dose pertussis (whooping cough), vaccine

\* In most areas it is the HSE school immunisation team that offers a vaccination service to school based children, however in some areas GPs provide this service. Parents can contact their local HSE office for further information.

Information on local HSE offices can be accessed at the follow web link, <http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list>.

For information on all vaccine preventable diseases, please see Chapter 9.

In addition, the website of the National Immunisation Office, [www.immunisation.ie](http://www.immunisation.ie) , is a very useful online resource with accurate and timely information on all immunisation issues in Ireland.