

Q&A: Childhood vaccinations during the pandemic

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DEAR MAYO CLINIC: My son is turning 6 soon, and we usually schedule a well-child visit with his pediatrician around his birthday. I know he needs several vaccinations, but with COVID-19 still being

around, I'm wondering if I should postpone the appointment. Is it safe for him to see the doctor and get vaccinated now?

ANSWER: Visiting a health care provider when you are ill may be a necessity, but amid the COVID-19 pandemic, it is understandable that you may have some hesitation.

You're encouraged to keep the appointment, as a well-child visit is a valuable opportunity for your son's health care provider to see him, talk with you about concerns and ensure he is growing appropriately.

Before going to this well-child visit, reach out to your son's health care provider to learn about the changes that have been made to his or her office spaces and processes to protect patient safety. Changes may include screening at entrances, requiring everyone to wear a mask, enhanced cleaning standards and limiting the number of people in the building. These changes are made to create safe environments for in-person care while protecting everyone's safety.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, parents are asked to be thoughtful about bringing children to public spaces, such as retail stores and clinics. However, families should try to keep their children on the recommended vaccination schedule as much as possible.

Many serious illnesses can not only make you or your child feel terrible, but also they present major risks to health. Fortunately, vaccines have been proven to be safe and effective in preventing various diseases and conditions. Some diseases may appear to pose a minimal threat, but the recent COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the wide-reaching effects of a [disease](#) that cannot be easily treated or prevented with a [vaccine](#).

Importance of vaccinations

Vaccinations are important, especially for young children. Infants receive some passive immunity from their mother after birth, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). However, this immunity wears off during the child's first year, with some immunity waning as early as 2 months.

Without vaccinations, children's bodies often can't fight diseases. This can lead to serious complications with lifelong effects and even death.

Germs can quickly travel through a community and sicken many people. If enough people are sickened, it can lead to an outbreak or a pandemic. But when enough people are vaccinated against a disease, the germs can't travel as easily from person to person, and the entire community is less likely to get the disease.

That means even people who can't be vaccinated, such as those with weak or failing immune systems, will have some protection from getting sick. And if a person gets sick, there's less chance of an outbreak or pandemic because it's harder for the disease to spread.

Immunization schedule

The CDC has a recommended immunization schedule based on when your child will get the most protection from a vaccine. In some cases, it is not as simple as catching up the next year because your child will remain unprotected for a year or there could be other consequences. This is the same schedule recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Family Physicians and many other groups.

Your [health care provider](#) can answer your questions and help your family determine if vaccinations are needed now or can be postponed. Factors that should be considered include if your area is experiencing an

increase in COVID-19 cases, the age of your children, which vaccinations are needed and safety measures implemented by your son's health care organization.

In a world of uncertainty, protecting yourself and your loved ones is of great importance. Vaccinations are at the front line of disease defense, and are one of the safest, most cost-effective preventive [health](#) measures.

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