



# Monthly Health Watch

News with a Monthly Health Theme

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## August is National Immunization Month

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**Childhood immunizations keep our children safe from a number of serious diseases. This is a good time of year to make sure your child is up-to-date on all of his/her immunizations. Continue reading to find out which vaccines the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention<sup>1</sup> (CDC) recommend for children 6 and under.**

In the United States, vaccines have eliminated or nearly eliminated many life-threatening diseases such as smallpox, polio and measles. By eliminating or decreasing the incidence of these and other diseases, immunizing children reduces hospitalizations and significantly decreases medical costs, including out-of-pocket expenses for families.



### Recommended immunizations for children from birth through 6 years old:

#### 1) Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B can lead to acute and chronic liver disease as well as liver cancer. Contrary to popular belief, hepatitis B is not only spread through sexual contact or drug use. Infants born to mothers with hepatitis B infection are at highest risk of contracting the virus. In addition, the disease can be spread through routine close contact with people living in the same household, and some studies suggest that normal child-to-child play can also spread infection. The hepatitis B vaccine is recommended as a series of three doses for all children. The CDC recommends that the first dose be given to all newborns at birth. The second and third doses should be given at 1 to 2 months, and 6 to 18 months.

#### *Also in this issue:*

- **What you need to know about cataracts:**  
Symptoms and treatments
- **Product Corner:** Aetna Vision<sup>SM</sup> Preferred

#### 2) Rotavirus (RV)

Rotavirus is the most common cause of severe diarrhea in children. Approximately 55,000 children in the United States are hospitalized each year from the severe diarrhea and vomiting caused by rotavirus. The CDC recommends that children receive a set of three immunizations for rotavirus at 2 months, 4 months and 6 months.

#### 3) Diphtheria/tetanus/pertussis (DTP/DTaP)

The DTaP immunization helps protect children from three different types of harmful bacteria that can cause serious, potentially fatal diseases. These diseases include diphtheria, a contagious bacterial disease that affects the respiratory system; tetanus (lockjaw); and pertussis (whooping cough).

<sup>1</sup> Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Immunization schedules. <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/recs/schedules/default.htm#child>

The vaccine is recommended as a five-dose series: three doses given to infants at 2, 4 and 6 months of age, followed by two additional booster doses at 15 to 18 months and at 4 to 6 years. Some regions in the United States are currently experiencing whooping cough outbreaks. Check with your doctor to see whether you are in a location with a higher risk of pertussis and schedule vaccinations for you and your children if your doctor says you are due.

#### **4) Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib)**

Hib disease causes potentially deadly meningitis, an infection around the spinal cord that can cause lifelong disability or mental retardation. Hib disease can also cause pneumonia and epiglottitis, an infection in the throat, which can be life-threatening as well. Because of widespread use of the vaccine since the early 1990s, Hib disease has been almost eliminated in the United States. Hib is recommended as a four-dose series: three doses given to infants at 2, 4 and 6 months of age, followed by a booster dose at 12 to 15 months.

#### **5) Pneumococcal disease - Pneumococcal conjugate (PCV)**

Pneumococcal disease is a bacterial infection that invades the lungs, causing one of the most common types of pneumonia. The bacteria can also cause serious infections in the blood (bacteremia) and coverings of the brain and spinal column (spinal meningitis), especially in young children. The CDC recommends that all children younger than 2 years of age receive the vaccine as a series of three doses given at 2, 4 and 6 months, and a fourth booster dose at 12 to 15 months.

#### **6) Poliomyelitis - Inactivated poliovirus vaccine (IPV)**

Although polio has been eliminated in the United States thanks to widespread immunizations over the past 50 years, it still remains a serious threat in other parts of the world. International travelers can bring the disease into the United States, so it is still important to immunize all children. IPV is recommended as a four-dose series: three doses given to infants at 2, 4 and 6 to 18 months of age, followed by a fourth dose given at 4 to 6 years.

#### **7) Influenza**

Influenza (flu) can be serious for both children and adults, and can lead to hospitalization or death. The influenza vaccine is recommended every flu season for all adults and children 6 months of age or older. If this is the first time for flu vaccine, a child 6 months through 8 years of age should receive two doses, separated by at least 4 weeks. If this child only receives one dose in the first season, he or she should receive two doses the next season, if still younger than 9 years. Ask your child's doctor if a second dose is needed.

#### **8) Measles/mumps/rubella (MMR)**

The MMR vaccine has greatly reduced the number of cases of measles, mumps and rubella each year. Each of these diseases can have serious consequences. Measles can be life-threatening, and mumps can lead to brain infection (meningitis/encephalitis). In pregnant women, rubella can cause birth defects and mental retardation in unborn babies. MMR is recommended as a two-dose series: The first dose given to toddlers at 12 to 15 months, followed by the second dose at 4 to 6 years.

#### **9) Varicella (chickenpox)**

Although chickenpox often is thought of as an annoying but harmless childhood disease, in some cases it can have serious complications such as pneumonia, brain swelling or death. The chickenpox vaccine is recommended for all children. Adults who did not have the disease as a child should be tested to see if they have evidence of naturally acquired protection (immunity). If not, vaccination is recommended for them as well because chickenpox can be even more serious in adults than in children. It is recommended that toddlers receive the varicella vaccine when they are between 12 to 15 months old and then again when they are 4 to 6 years old.

#### **10) Hepatitis A**

Hepatitis A is an infection of the liver caused by a virus and can be deadly. The CDC recommends that children receive two doses of the vaccine between the ages of 12 and 23 months.

Also, remember – young children aren't the only ones who need these vaccinations. Check with your doctor to make sure you and the rest of your family are up-to-date on all of your vaccinations as well. Keeping the entire family immunized against these preventable illnesses is a simple step you can take to help keep everyone in your household healthy.

For more information and tips on vaccinations, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/>.

## You don't have to live with cataracts

***August is also Cataract Awareness Month. Read on to find out about the symptoms of cataracts and ways to maintain healthy vision for life.***

Most cataracts develop as the body ages. After years of light reflecting off the lens of the eye, the lens hardens and becomes cloudy. This often results in dull, cloudy or blurred vision. Cataracts start out small and have little effect on vision at first. But as the cataract grows, it clouds more of the lens.

### *Did You Know?*

- Cataracts are the leading cause of vision loss in the world.
- Close to 20.5 million Americans age 40 and older have cataracts.
- By age 80, more than half of all Americans will have cataracts.

### **Cataract symptoms include:**

- Painless clouded, blurry or dim vision
- Increasing difficulty seeing at night or in low light
- Sensitivity to light and glare, seeing halos around lights
- Colors seem faded or yellowed
- The need for brighter light for reading and other activities
- Frequent changes in eyeglass or contact lens prescription
- Double vision within one eye<sup>2</sup>

The only way to know for sure if you have cataracts is to visit your eye care professional for a dilated eye exam. It is recommended that patients start being screened for cataracts at age 40, when early signs of disease and changes in vision may start to occur. Your doctor will let you know when to return for follow-up exams. Starting at age 65, you should start seeing your eye doctor every year because your risk for cataracts and other eye diseases increases as you get older.

### **How are cataracts treated?**

Currently, there are no medications or exercises that will make cataracts disappear. If the cataracts are not severe and don't interfere with your life, you and your doctor may decide surgery is not needed. If your vision is only slightly blurry, a change in your eyeglass prescription may help for a while. But when your vision does begin to interfere with your daily activities, cataracts can be treated surgically. Talk with your ophthalmologist about your options.

Cataract surgery is often performed as an outpatient procedure and does not require an overnight stay. There are usually few restrictions after surgery, and you will be able to resume your normal activities almost immediately.

The most common procedure used for removing cataracts is called phacoemulsification. During this procedure, an eye surgeon removes the cloudy lens and replaces it with an intraocular lens (IOL) implant made of plastic, silicone or acrylic. This new lens allows light to pass through and focus on the retina. The IOL becomes a permanent part of your eye.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Cataract Awareness.* American Academy of Ophthalmology. <http://www.aao.org/aaosite/eyemd/upload/August.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> *Cataract Treatment.* EMedicineHealth. [http://www.emedicinehealth.com/ataracts/page7\\_em.htm](http://www.emedicinehealth.com/ataracts/page7_em.htm)

**Factors that increase the risk for cataracts:**

- Advanced age
- Diabetes
- Family history
- Smoking
- Previous eye injury or inflammation
- Prolonged steroid use (especially combined use of oral and inhaled steroids)
- Extensive exposure to sunlight<sup>4</sup>

The American Academy of Ophthalmology.

For more information on cataract detection and treatment, visit [http://www.nei.nih.gov/health/cataract/cataract\\_facts.asp](http://www.nei.nih.gov/health/cataract/cataract_facts.asp).

***Product Corner: Spotlight on Aetna Vision<sup>SM</sup> Preferred***

Aetna recently launched a new vision benefits product called Aetna Vision<sup>SM</sup> Preferred. Members of these new vision plans will have access to one of the largest vision networks in the country and can save an average of 40 percent off retail prices for routine eye exams and eyewear. Aetna Vision Preferred works like a medical benefits plan that includes member copays and allowances for exam services and corrective eyewear, while still extending negotiated discounts for non-covered products and services.

Aetna Vision Preferred members can receive the most cost-effective care when they visit one of the more than 40,000 participating vision providers across the country, including both independent eye doctors and optical retailers such as LensCrafters, Pearle Vision, Target Optical<sup>®</sup>, Sears Optical and JCPenney Optical. Out-of-network benefits are included in all plans.

Aetna Vision Preferred plans are currently available to employers with 3,000 or more employees. Aetna expects to expand access to other customer segments later this year. The vision program can be customized with a wide range of benefit levels and copays. It can also be offered on a stand-alone basis or with other Aetna health plans.

For more information, visit [http://www.aetna.com/news/newsReleases/2010/0506\\_Vision.html](http://www.aetna.com/news/newsReleases/2010/0506_Vision.html).

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<sup>4</sup> *Cataract Awareness*. American Academy of Ophthalmology.  
<http://www.aao.org/aaosite/eyemd/upload/August.pdf>