

Vaccine Guidelines

“There are risks to everything we do, from driving in the car to taking an antibiotic to treat an infection. Vaccines are no different, but the risk of harm from vaccines is much lower than the consequences of contracting the disease itself.”

— Melissa Garretson, MD, Fort Worth, pediatrician and adviser for TMA’s Be Wise —Immunize

Federal regulations help ensure U.S. vaccines go through years of stringent testing before they become licensed and available to the general public. Physicians can help ensure the safety and efficacy of vaccines by carefully monitoring:

- Vaccine storage and handling,
- Vaccine administration,
- Timing and spacing of vaccine doses,
- Precautions and contraindications,
- Vaccine side effects (and reporting suspected side effects), and
- Communication about vaccine benefits and risks.

For best possible results from vaccines, you should carefully follow each vaccine package insert’s recommendations for storage, handling, and administration.

Take these additional steps to help ensure vaccine safety:

- Inspect the vaccines upon delivery and monitor refrigerator and freezer temperatures to assure you maintain the vaccines’ cold chain (proper temperature to preserve potency) during storage and handling.
- Rotate the vaccine stock so you use the oldest vaccines first.
- Never administer a vaccine after its expiration date.
- Administer vaccines within the prescribed time following reconstitution.
- Do not draw vaccines into syringes until you are ready to administer the shot.
- Never mix vaccines in the same syringe unless the Food and Drug Administration has approved them for mixing.
- Record the vaccine and administration information, including the injection sites and lot numbers, in your patient’s medical record.

- If errors in vaccine storage and administration occur, immediately take corrective action to avoid further errors and notify the appropriate public health authorities.

Other points to remember about vaccine safety:

- Follow the recommended immunization schedules for children, adolescents, and adults. The influenza and childhood schedules are updated annually.
- Give your patients ALL the vaccines they need during the same visit because it may be your only opportunity to keep them on the appropriate immunization schedule.
- You can decrease the chance of vaccination errors by consistently updating your patients’ medical history and keeping careful records of their vaccination status.
- Screen for contraindications and precautions. Do not give vaccines to patients who have a chance of contraindication, or who have conditions that make the vaccine ineffective or increase the chances of a serious side effect.

Contraindications and Side Effects

In most cases, these are NOT contraindications:

- Mild to moderate local reactions and/or low-grade or moderate fever following a dose of the vaccine,
- Mild acute illness with or without low-grade fever,
- Recent exposure to an infectious disease,
- Current antimicrobial therapy,
- Convalescent phase of illness,
- Premature birth, and
- Breastfeeding.

Most patients experience no vaccine side effects or only very minimal ones, such as a mild fever, or redness, swelling, or soreness at the injection site.

In extremely rare instances, some patients have severe side effects or an allergic reaction.

Be sure to have procedures and supplies in place to provide emergency care for patients who have an anaphylactic reaction, require cardiopulmonary resuscitation, or need epinephrine and equipment for maintaining an airway.

Sources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Provider’s Role: Importance of Vaccine Administration and Vaccine Storage & Handling. www.cdc.gov/vaccines/recs/vac-admin/providers-role-vacc-admin-storage.htm.

Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System. <http://vaers.hhs.gov/>.