

Vaccinations for Children from Birth to 12 Years Old in South Africa

Vaccinations are a key part of keeping children healthy, especially during their first few years of life. In South Africa, the Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI) ensures that children receive essential vaccines for free to protect them from serious diseases like polio, tuberculosis (TB), and measles. Here's a guide to the important vaccinations your child needs from birth to 12 years old, based on the South African immunisation schedule.

Vaccinations from Birth to 6 Weeks

1. Birth:

- **BCG (Bacillus Calmette-Guérin) Vaccine:** This vaccine protects against **tuberculosis (TB)**, a disease that affects the lungs. TB is still common in South Africa, so this vaccine is given to all newborns at birth¹.
- **Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV-0):** This first dose of the oral polio vaccine helps protect against **poliovirus**, which can cause paralysis and even death².

2. At 6 Weeks:

- **Hexavalent Vaccine (DTP-IPV-Hib-HepB):** This combination vaccine protects against six diseases: **diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (whooping cough), polio, Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib), and hepatitis B**. It's one of the most important vaccines your baby will receive³.
- **Rotavirus Vaccine:** Protects against **rotavirus**, which causes severe diarrhoea and can be dangerous, especially in babies.
- **Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine (PCV):** Protects against **pneumococcal bacteria**, which can cause pneumonia, meningitis, and ear infections.

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Vaccinations at 10 and 14 Weeks

3. At 10 Weeks:

- **Hexavalent Vaccine:** The second dose to boost your baby's protection against diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, polio, Hib, and hepatitis B.
- **Rotavirus Vaccine:** The second dose to protect against severe diarrhoea caused by rotavirus.

4. At 14 Weeks:

- **Hexavalent Vaccine:** The third and final dose of this combination vaccine.
- **Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine (PCV):** The second dose to protect against pneumococcal infections.

Vaccinations at 6 Months

5. At 6 Months:

- **Measles Vaccine (1st dose):** Protects against **measles**, a highly contagious disease that can lead to complications like pneumonia, diarrhoea, and brain swelling. Measles outbreaks still happen in South Africa, so it's vital to get this vaccine⁴.
- **Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV):** A booster dose to continue protection against polio.

Vaccinations at 9 Months

6. At 9 Months:

- **Measles Vaccine (2nd dose):** The second dose strengthens the immunity gained from the first dose to give full protection against measles.
- **Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine (PCV):** The third dose to ensure protection from pneumococcal infections, which can cause serious illnesses like meningitis and pneumonia.

Vaccinations at 12 to 18 Months

7. At 12 Months:

- **Hepatitis A Vaccine** (if recommended by your doctor): Protects against **hepatitis A**, a virus that affects the liver. It's particularly important in areas where hepatitis A outbreaks may occur.

8. At 18 Months:

- **DTP Booster (Diphtheria, Tetanus, Pertussis):** This booster shot strengthens the protection your child received from the earlier doses against diphtheria, tetanus, and whooping cough.

Vaccinations at 6 and 12 Years

9. At 6 Years:

- **Tetanus and Diphtheria Booster (Td):** A booster dose to maintain protection against **tetanus and diphtheria** as your child grows older.

10. At 12 Years:

- **Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Vaccine:** This vaccine is recommended for girls and protects against **HPV**, which can lead to cervical cancer later in life. The South African government has rolled out an HPV vaccination programme in schools for girls aged 9 to 12 years⁵.

Why Vaccinations Are Important

Vaccinations help your child's immune system fight off infections before they can cause serious harm. In South Africa, we've seen diseases like measles and polio greatly reduced thanks to vaccinations. However, if people stop vaccinating their children, these diseases could come back.

Herd immunity also plays a vital role in protecting vulnerable members of the community, like babies and people with weakened immune systems. The more children vaccinated, the harder it is for diseases to spread⁶.

Where Can I Get My Child Vaccinated?

Vaccinations for children are available for free at public health clinics across South Africa through the ****Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI)****¹. Private doctors and pharmacies also offer vaccinations but may charge a fee. Always check with your healthcare provider about the best time to bring your child in for their vaccines.

You can view the full South African vaccination schedule and learn more about where to get vaccines on the **Department of Health's** website⁷.

References

1. **Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI) - South Africa** Western Cape Government - EPI
2. **Polio Vaccine Information** NICD - Polio
3. **Hexavalent Vaccine Details** Gauteng Health - Immunisation Schedule
4. **Measles Outbreak and Prevention** NICD - Measles
5. **HPV Vaccination Programme in Schools** South African Department of Health - HPV Vaccination
6. **Herd Immunity and Vaccines** NICD - Vaccine-Preventable Diseases
7. **Full South African Vaccination Schedule** [Department of Health - Vaccination Schedule](#)

