

In babies, the main symptoms of meningitis may include:

- a high-pitched, moaning cry
- irritable when picked up
- drowsy, difficult to wake
- being floppy and listless or stiff with jerky movements
- skin that is pale, blotchy or turning blue
- fever, with cold hands and feet
- red or purple spots that do not fade under pressure. (Do the glass test explained below.)

**i** If you press a glass tumbler firmly against a septicaemic rash, the rash will not fade. You will be able to see the rash through the glass. If this happens, get a doctor's help immediately.

The rash may be harder to see on black or brown skin. Check paler areas such as the palms of the hand or soles of the feet, roof of the mouth, tummy, whites of the eyes or inside the eyelids.

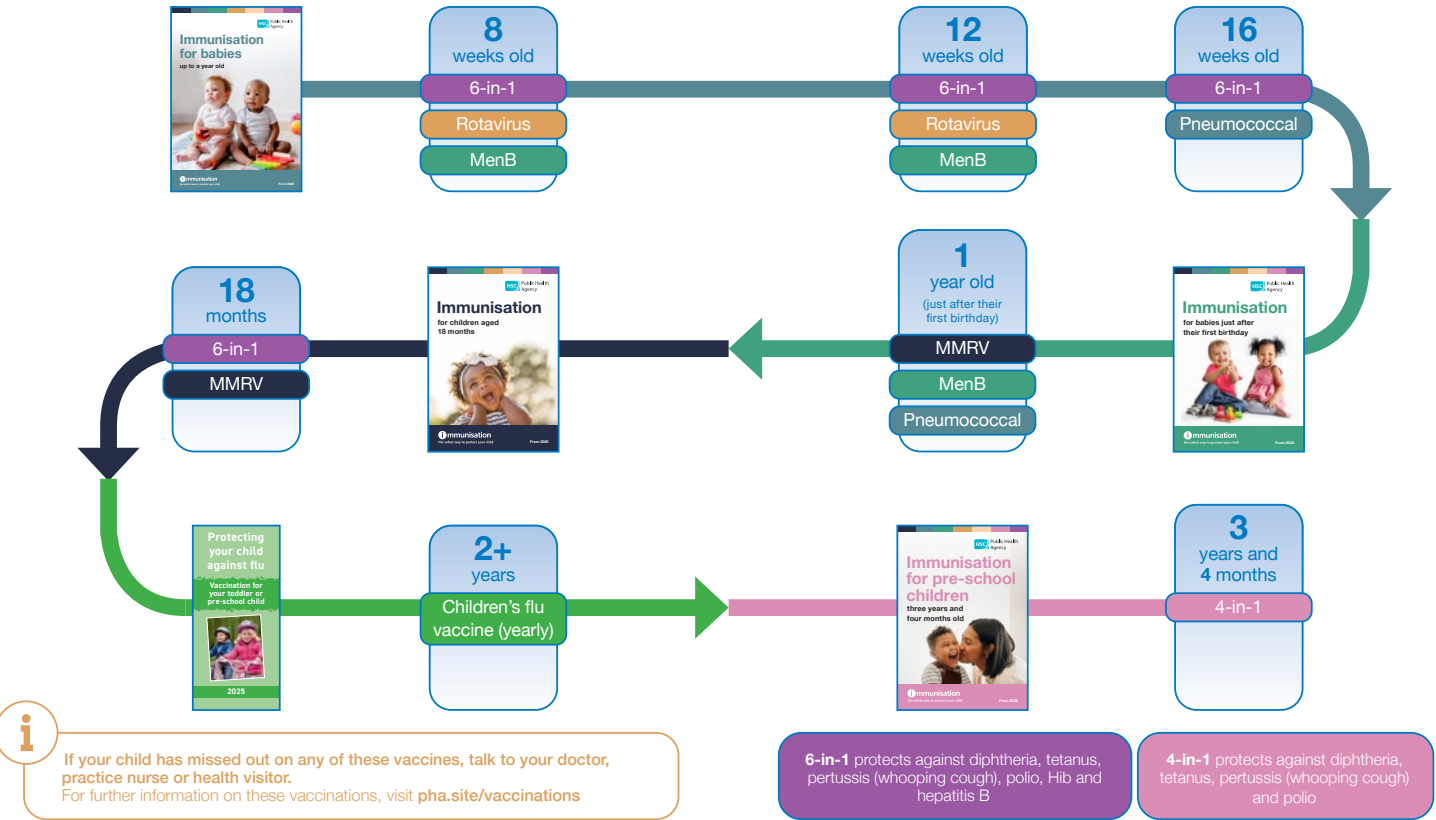


Image provided by Meningitis Now [meningitisnow.org](http://meningitisnow.org)



Image provided by Meningitis Research Foundation [meningitis.org](http://meningitis.org)

## Routine childhood vaccination schedule



If your child becomes unwell with **one or more** of these signs or symptoms, contact your doctor urgently.

If you are still worried after getting advice, trust your instincts and take your child to your nearest hospital with an emergency department.

If you would like further information about immunisation, visit [pha.site/vaccinations](http://pha.site/vaccinations) or [www.nidirect.gov.uk/childhood-immunisation](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/childhood-immunisation)



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# Immunisation for premature babies



**i**mmunisation  
the safest way to protect your child

From 2026

“The two public health interventions that have had the greatest impact on the world’s health are **clean water and vaccines.**”

World Health Organization

### What is immunisation and why is it needed?

Immunisation is a way of protecting ourselves from serious diseases. There are some diseases that can kill children or cause lasting damage to their health. Immunisations are given to prepare your child’s immune system (the body’s natural defence system) to fight off those diseases when your child comes into contact with them.

### When should my baby be immunised?

It is important that your baby has their immunisations at the right age (see the back cover). This will help to keep the risk of your baby catching a serious disease as low as possible. The risk of side effects from some vaccines may increase if you put them off.

### My baby was born early. When should premature babies have their first immunisation?

Premature babies have a higher risk of infection. They should be immunised in line with the recommended schedule from 8 weeks after birth, no matter how premature they were. This may happen while your baby is in hospital, you will need to discuss this with your doctor.

Some babies may need additional vaccines soon after they are born if they are at high risk. For example, some very high-risk babies can get the RSV vaccine to protect them against respiratory syncytial virus during the winter months. RSV is a common cause of a type of chest infection and can be serious. Your child’s specialist, doctor or health visitor will give you more information if your child needs extra protection.

### What happens at the appointment?

The doctor or nurse will explain the immunisation process to you, and answer any questions you have. The vaccine is injected into the muscle of the thigh. If your baby was born very prematurely then he/she may still be in hospital when the first routine immunisation is due.

### Are there any reasons why my baby should not be immunised?

There are very few reasons why babies cannot be immunised. The vaccines should not be given to babies who have had:

- a confirmed anaphylactic reaction (severe allergic reaction) to a previous dose of the vaccine, or
- a confirmed anaphylactic reaction to neomycin, streptomycin, or polymyxin B (antibiotics used in vaccines).

If your baby’s immune system is ‘suppressed’ (because they are having treatment for a serious condition such as a transplant or cancer), then your baby may not be able to have some vaccines. Your doctor or practice nurse should get advice from a specialist.

There are no other medical reasons why these vaccines should definitely not be given.

### Dealing with common side effects

There may be redness, soreness or tenderness where the injection is given and a few babies may develop a mild fever. Make sure you keep your child cool by:

- giving them plenty of fluids;
- making sure they don’t have too many layers of clothes or blankets on;
- and giving infant paracetamol liquid – check the dose with your doctor.

Fever is more common after the MenB vaccine. To prevent this it is recommended that babies are given three doses of infant paracetamol after their MenB vaccines at 8 and 12 weeks of age. It is important to check the dose with your doctor.

**i Do not give medicines that contain aspirin to children under 16.**

If you are concerned about your baby at any time then trust your instincts and speak to your GP.

For more detailed information about the vaccines, potential side effects, paracetamol and meningitis, see *Immunisation for babies up to a year old.*



### Watch out for meningitis and septicaemia (blood poisoning)

Hib, MenB, and pneumococcal vaccines protect against the most important bacteria causing meningitis and septicaemia in children and young people. However, as these diseases can be caused by many other bacteria and viruses, it is important to know the signs and symptoms of these illnesses.

Early symptoms of meningitis include fever, being irritable and restless, vomiting and refusing food – symptoms that are also common with colds and flu. But a baby with meningitis or septicaemia can become seriously unwell within hours.