

What is special about people with Down syndrome and immunisation

People with Down syndrome have a weakened immune system (immunodeficiency). They are more likely to get respiratory tract infections and for these infections to affect the lower respiratory tract and cause pneumonia, bronchiolitis or croup. Infections may be more severe, and it can take longer to recover. Skin conditions, such as eczema, are more common in people with Down syndrome and can be aggravated by chickenpox disease.

Immunisation can protect against some of the bacteria and viruses that cause these diseases. We have provided this fact sheet to help parents, caregivers and adults make an informed decision around immunisation.

Key points

Immunise on-time

- » National Immunisation Schedule vaccines at 6 weeks, 3 months, 5 months, 12 months, 15 months, 4 years, 11 years, 12 years, 45 years, and 65 years of age.^{Free}
- » Catch-up doses of missed Immunisation Schedule vaccines.^{Free}
- » COVID-19 immunisation, currently from 12 years of age.^{Free}
- » Annual influenza immunisation from 6 months of age.^{Free}
- » *Prevenar 13*[®] for protection against pneumococcal disease up to 5 years of age instead of *Synflorix*[®].^{Free} and for older children, adolescents and adults who haven't had any *Prevenar 13* doses.^{Free for some children and adolescents aged 5 years to under 18 years}
- » *Pneumovax*[®]23 for protection against pneumococcal disease for children from 2 years of age and adolescents.^{Free for children aged under 18 years}
- » Consider whether chickenpox^{Free for some children} or meningococcal^{Free for some adolescents/young adults} immunisations are needed.
- » For adults, consider whether hepatitis B immunisation is needed for those born before 1988 (when hepatitis B vaccine was added to the Immunisation Schedule)^{Free for some adults} or pneumococcal immunisation is needed.^{Not free}

National Immunisation Schedule vaccines

It is important for infants, children, adolescents and adults with Down syndrome to receive the free National Immunisation Schedule vaccines when they are due (6 weeks, 3 months, 5 months, 12 months, 15 months, 4 years, 11 years, 12 years, 45 years and 65 years of age). It is never too late to catch-up most Schedule immunisations.

Other recommended vaccines

Other vaccines are recommended and may be free or can be purchased through your doctor. These are described in the table below.

Vaccine	Recommendation	Eligibility for free immunisation
Chickenpox vaccine	Children and adults who have not had chickenpox disease or immunisation, particularly if they have a skin condition like eczema.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Children born on/after 1 April 2016.^{Free} » Adolescents who turn 11 years of age on/after 1 July 2017 and they have not already had the immunisation or chickenpox disease.^{Free} <i>Varilrix</i> [®] can be purchased for children and by adults who are not eligible for free chickenpox immunisation.
COVID-19 vaccine	COVID-19 disease can cause serious illness. People with Down syndrome are up to four times more likely to need hospital treatment than those who do not have Down syndrome.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Currently, adolescents aged 12 years or older and adults can receive COVID-19 immunisation. » Overseas studies are assessing the safety of the COVID-19 vaccines in children aged under 12 years, and how well they work. In future, COVID-19 vaccines may be available for children aged under 12 years.
Hepatitis B vaccine	People in close living situations, e.g. group accommodation, may share their home with someone who has a chronic hepatitis B infection.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Children and adolescents aged under 18 years.^{Free} » Some adults.^{Only free for adults in certain circumstances} <i>Engerix-B</i> [®] can be purchased by adults who are not eligible for free hepatitis B immunisation.
Influenza (flu) vaccine	Infants, children and adults, influenza can cause a serious illness and can also increase the risk of getting a second infection that causes pneumonia.	Annual flu immunisation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Infants from 6 months of age, children and adults.^{Free} Influenza vaccine can be purchased by family and support people who are not eligible for free flu immunisation.
Meningococcal vaccine	People in close living situations, e.g. group accommodation, may have a higher risk of meningococcal disease, an illness that can cause inflammation of the membranes around the brain.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Adolescents and young adults aged 13–25 years inclusively who are going to living in a boarding school hostel, tertiary education halls of residence, military barrack, or prison within three months, or who are already in their first year living in one of these close living situations.^{Free} » Adolescents and young adults aged 13–25 years inclusively who have been living in a boarding school hostel, tertiary education halls of residence, military barrack, or prison for more than one year.^{Only free until 30 November 2021} Group, residential and supported accommodation are not included in the close living situations eligible for free meningococcal immunisation. <i>Menactra</i> [®] or <i>Nimenrix</i> [®] can be purchased for children and adolescents and by adults who are not eligible for free meningococcal immunisation.

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Other recommended vaccines continued

Vaccine	Recommendation	Eligibility for free immunisation
Pneumococcal vaccines	Infants, children and adults, are more likely to get respiratory infections and these can also increase the risk of getting a second infection that causes pneumonia.	<p>Infants and children aged under 5 years</p> <p><u>Prevenar® 13</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Given at the 6 weeks, 3 months, 5 months and 12 months of age immunisation visits instead of <i>Synflorix®</i>.<i>Free</i> » Can be given for catch-up immunisation for children aged under 5 years instead of <i>Synflorix®</i>.<i>Free</i> » One dose for children aged 13 months to under 5 years who have received all their <i>Synflorix</i> doses but have not received any <i>Prevenar® 13</i> doses.<i>Free</i> <p><u>Pneumovax®23</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » The first dose for children aged 2 years to under 5 years and a second dose five years later.<i>Free</i> <p>Children aged 5 years to under 18 years</p> <p><u>Prevenar® 13</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » One dose for children aged 5 years to under 18 years who have not received any doses of <i>Prevenar® 13</i>.<i>Free if they have received at least two doses of Synflorix</i> <p><u>Pneumovax®23</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Two doses given at least five years apart.<i>Free</i> <p>Adults aged 18 years or older</p> <p><u>Prevenar® 13</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » One dose for adults who have not received any doses of <i>Prevenar® 13</i>.<i>Not free</i> <p><u>Pneumovax®23</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Two or three doses depending on the person's age when they have their first <i>Pneumovax®23</i>.<i>Not free</i> <p><i>Prevenar® 13</i> and/or <i>Pneumovax®23</i> can be purchased for children aged 5 years or older and adults who are not eligible to receive the vaccine for free.</p>

Vaccines are prescription medicines. Talk with your doctor or nurse about the benefits or any risks.

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