

VACCINES 101 FOR WIC STAFF



VACCINATE
YOUR FAMILY

Your quick-reference guide to
talking with families about vaccines

Updated June 2026

Your Role in Vaccine Conversations

- As WIC staff, you **do not give medical advice**, but you **can talk about vaccines** and help families find services
- WIC staff are often **trusted messengers**—especially for pregnant women and new parents



Here's how you can support families:

ENCOURAGE -----> INFORM -----> REFER

Bring up vaccines in a friendly, non-judgmental way. Encourage families to protect their children by staying up to date on recommended vaccines, especially when they're young and most at-risk.

Share basic facts in plain language. Be prepared with printed materials, trusted links, and answers to common concerns.

Offer to help parents find a provider, clinic, or immunization record. Use tools like QR codes, referral forms, and flyers.

Why Vaccines Matter

VACCINES:

- Protect against serious diseases like measles, flu, COVID-19, and whooping cough (pertussis)
- Reduce the risk of serious complications from these diseases, like hospitalization and death, for babies, young children, and pregnant women
- Help protect the whole community

Vaccines help the immune system build defenses before illness strikes.

Vaccines help protect everyone—especially those who are too young or unable to be vaccinated.

How Vaccines Work

VACCINES:

- Teach your immune system to recognize and fight infections
- Prevent diseases before they spread and cause serious illness
- Help protect the whole community—especially babies and others who can't be vaccinated

How Vaccines Help the Body Fight Off Disease:



The Vaccine Enters the Body
Tiny pieces of a virus or bacteria (or instructions about them) are introduced.



The Immune System Learns to Fight
The body practices fighting the germ and builds memory cells to protect you.



You're Protected
Now, if the real germ shows up, your body knows how to stop it—fast.

Overview of Vaccines

Recommended vaccines are intended to provide timely protection for babies, children, adolescents, adults, and pregnant women. The table below represents an overview to discuss with your client.

It's recommended to acknowledge that these vaccine recommendations consider factors such as safety and effectiveness and potential disease severity. It's important that your clients discuss their individual vaccine recommendations with a trusted healthcare provider.

AGE GROUP	COMMON VACCINES AND PREVENTIVE ANTIBODIES
Birth–6 Years	COVID-19, chickenpox, DTaP, hepatitis A/B, Hib, influenza (flu), MMR, pneumococcal, polio, rotavirus, RSV antibody
7–18 Years	COVID-19, HPV, influenza (flu), meningitis ACWY/B, Tdap
Pregnant Women	COVID-19, influenza (flu), RSV, Tdap (every pregnancy)
Adults	COVID-19, hepatitis B, influenza (flu), pneumococcal, RSV, shingles, Tdap/Td



Please refer to recommendations and immunization schedules from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP), American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

More Information About Vaccines During Pregnancy

Vaccines during pregnancy protect both the mom and baby before and after birth.



RECOMMENDED:

- **Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis):** Administer during each pregnancy, preferably between 26-36 weeks gestation, to protect newborns from whooping cough
- **Flu shot:** Recommended during any trimester of pregnancy, ideally by the end of October, to protect mother and baby from flu complications
- **RSV (respiratory syncytial virus):** A single dose is recommended between 32 through 36 weeks gestation during September through January to protect infants from severe disease

HIGHLY CONSIDER:

- **COVID-19:** The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists strongly recommends that pregnant women be vaccinated against COVID-19

Addressing Concerns, Responding to Questions, and Referrals & Resources



Common Questions & Examples of What to Say

WIC staff don't need to debate or persuade—just offer facts, empathy, and referrals.

QUESTION/CONCERN	SUGGESTED RESPONSE
Are vaccines safe?	Yes. They're tested and monitored by health experts—both during development and after they've been approved.
Do vaccines cause autism?	No. Decades of research conducted worldwide have found no link between vaccines and autism.
Why do babies get so many vaccines?	It may seem like a lot, but each one protects against a different serious disease. Babies are most vulnerable to disease, and vaccines are designed to protect them early.
How do I know vaccines will keep my baby safe?	That's a great question. The vaccines recommended during pregnancy are safe for you and your baby. They protect both of you during pregnancy and give your baby early protection after birth through the antibodies you pass on.
What if I missed some vaccines during the pandemic?	That's really common. Doctors can help you catch up safely. I can help you find a provider or clinic if you'd like.
Can't we just rely on natural immunity?	Natural infections can be risky—some cause serious illness or even death. Vaccines give your body protection so that you can avoid getting really sick.
What if I don't believe in vaccines?	I respect your choice. Would you like info or help with finding a provider you can talk more about this with to make the best decision for you and your family?
I can't afford vaccines for my family. What should I do?	Here is information on the Vaccines for Children Program , which provides free vaccines for eligible children.



Making a Strong Referral



EXAMPLE: You’ve just finished talking with a parent about the importance of staying on schedule with vaccines. Their child is 18 months old, and they’re unsure if they’re up to date.

You might say:

Then follow with something like:

“It’s great that you’re thinking about this. If you’d like, I can help you find a local clinic or check your child’s vaccine schedule.”



“Here’s a flyer with a QR code to help you find a clinic.”

or

“This is a list of nearby clinics that offer vaccines at low or no cost.”

Key elements of a strong referral:



Ask permission or offer support
(“Would you like help...”)



Give a concrete next step
(link, list, or printed resource)



Be kind and judgment-free

Helpful referral tools WIC staff can use:



Flyers with QR codes to local clinic finder



List of local clinics you can recommend



[Vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov) to find local pharmacies



Quick Tips + Resource List

Staff Tips for Conversations with Parents and Parents-to-Be:



Ask open-ended questions, such as:

“What have you heard about vaccines?”

“Would you like more information or help finding a healthcare provider or clinic?”



Use and share trusted, ready-made tools such as QR codes, clinic lists, and printed schedules.

Offer to look things up together if possible.

Listen without judgment

- Let parents share concerns
- Validate emotions without correcting or debating (*“A lot of people wonder about that. You are not alone.”*)



Stick to simple, positive messages

- Emphasize protection and safety
- Avoid medical jargon—focus on benefits (*“Getting vaccinated protects you and your family.”*)



Use consistent, calm tone—even if families are hesitant.

Know your local resources.

Keep a short referral list handy (clinics, health departments).



Bring it up again at their next visit.

Even if they decline today, you can still check in later.

“Just a reminder—I can still help you with that if you’re interested.”

ADDITIONAL IMMUNIZATION RESOURCES:



[Vaccinate Your Family Poster for Daycares and WIC Clinics](#)



[Vaccinate Your Family Parents/Parents-To-Be 2025 Resource](#)
[-English](#) [-Spanish](#)



[Vaccinate Your Family VPD eBooks](#)
[-Child and Teen \(English\)](#) [-Child and Teen \(Spanish\)](#) [-Adult \(English\)](#) [-Adult \(Spanish\)](#)



[Vaccinate Your Family’s “Vaccines Explained” videos](#)



[Vaccinate Your Family + Día de la Mujer Latina Fotonovela: Vaccines During Pregnancy](#)



[Talking to Parents About Vaccines](#)



[AAP’s Healthy Children & AAP’s Healthy Children in Spanish](#)



[Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia’s Vaccine Education Center](#)