

VACCINATION AND EPILEPSY

I have epilepsy. Does this change what vaccinations I can and can't receive?

People who have epilepsy can safely be vaccinated with almost all vaccines. Epilepsy itself is not a contra-indication for vaccination. If you regularly have seizures, or are taking any type(s) of anti-epileptic drug, you should still be vaccinated absolutely as normal.

Your children should also be vaccinated as normal. A family history of epilepsy does not affect vaccination in any way.

You should not receive a vaccine if you have had a confirmed clear allergic reaction to the same vaccine or another vaccine against the same disease.

If you have an allergy to eggs, then you should not receive influenza or yellow fever vaccines, as these contain egg proteins. If you are allergic to eggs and require these vaccines, your doctor will seek specialist advice about vaccinating you under expert supervision.

My child has epilepsy. Should they receive the normal childhood vaccines?

Children with epilepsy can safely be vaccinated if their condition is stable. Epilepsy itself is not a contra-indication for vaccination.

Very young children (under 12 months old) who have epilepsy may have their vaccination postponed while their condition is investigated and stabilised.

When immunised with diphtheria, tetanus and whooping cough (DTP) vaccine, children with a family or personal history of seizures had no significant adverse events and their developmental progress was normal (Ramsay *et al.* *CDR Review*. 1997; 5: R65-7).

Some vaccines can cause a short rise in body temperature as a side effect. Rarely, this can trigger a seizure (called a febrile seizure). If your child has had a febrile seizure in the past, or if anyone in your family has a history of febrile seizures, then they have a slightly increased risk of having a seizure after their vaccination. However they should still be vaccinated as normal.

Ask for advice about how to prevent and manage a high body temperature in your child when they receive the vaccine. For example, giving regular paracetamol for the 24 hours after vaccination may be advisable for some children receiving the DTP vaccine.

One study found that 2 to 3 in 10,000 children had a febrile convulsion within two weeks of having their MMR vaccination. These children all recovered fully (Barlow *et al.* *N Engl J Med*. 2001; 345: 656-61).

Vaccines that may cause a temperature include the DTP vaccine, and the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine. The high temperature usually happens within 24 hours with the DTP vaccine, but may take up to a week to develop with the MMR vaccine.

This information is taken from:

- “The Green Book”, UK Department of Health information on Immunisation Against Infectious Disease. 2006 edition. The latest version is available to download from www.dh.gov.uk/greenbook;
- BMJ Best Treatments website (<http://www.besttreatments.co.uk/>).

For the most comprehensive, up-to-date and accurate of information on vaccines, disease and immunisation in the UK, visit <http://www.immunisation.nhs.uk/>.

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