



A guide to vaccinations for people with a learning disability

Part 1: About vaccines



About this guide



This is an easy read guide. You may need support to read it. Ask someone you know to help you.



Words in **bold blue writing** may be hard to understand. You can check what the words in blue mean on **page 21**.



This guide was written by:

- [Easy Read Wales](#)
- [Public Health Wales](#)
- and people with a learning disability as part of the [Vaccination Information Project](#).

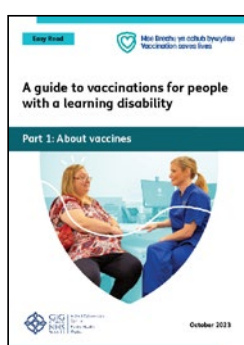


For more information about **vaccines** offered in Wales go to the Public Health Wales website: phw.nhs.wales/vaccines.



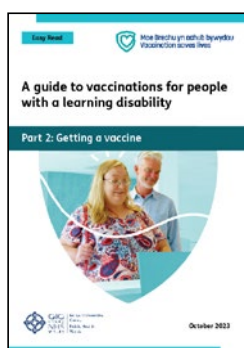
To tell us what you think about this easy read version, [click here](#).

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This is **part 1** of our guide to **vaccination** for people with a learning disability. Part 1 explains:

- what **vaccines** are
- how **vaccines** work
- and why **vaccines** are important.



Please read **part 2** too. Part 2 explains:

- what getting a **vaccine** is like
- your rights to support
- and how to look after yourself after a **vaccine**.



Vaccination is the way we give someone a **vaccine**.

A **vaccine** is a medicine that helps your body fight diseases. It helps keep you safe from getting very ill.

Most **vaccines** are given by injection. Sometimes people call them **jabs**.



You can also watch our video about **vaccination** [here](#) or go to YouTube and search for:

Public Health Wales: Rachel's story - getting a vaccine.

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Introduction



You have the right to be treated equally, with dignity and respect.



It is important to look after your health.



Public Health Wales has different services to help people look after their health. This includes things like:

- helping people to stop smoking
- testing early for cancer
- and **vaccination**.

About vaccination



Vaccines are very important. They can protect you and those around you from getting very ill.



Vaccination is one of the best ways to protect against some diseases, like:

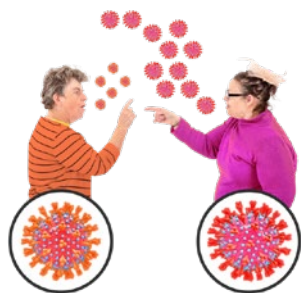
- COVID-19
- measles
- and flu.



Millions of lives are saved around the world every year by **vaccines**.



If most people are **vaccinated**, it is harder for a disease to spread.



If people stop having **vaccines**, diseases could spread quickly.

People with a learning disability and vaccines



Vaccines can help protect you from the diseases that can make you very ill.



Babies, children, and young people are usually given **vaccines** at:

- their GP surgery
- or school.



Having all your childhood **vaccines** gives you good protection from things like:

- Measles
- Meningitis
- Mumps
- Pneumonia
- Rubella (German measles)
- Some cancers
- Whooping cough



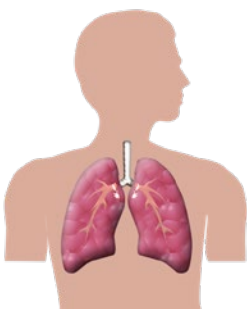
If you are a parent, it is important to take your child for all their **vaccines**.



You can find out more about childhood **vaccines** on the Public Health Wales website:
phw.nhs.wales/vaccines.



Some people can get very ill from diseases that affect their breathing system. Some people may even die. Children and adults with a learning disability are at a higher risk.



Diseases that affect your breathing system include things like:

- Pneumonia
- whooping cough
- flu
- and COVID-19.



Adults with a learning disability can get free **vaccines** to protect from:

- **Flu**



You should get a flu **vaccine** every year in the autumn. You can get it at your GP surgery, or your local pharmacy.



You should get an invite from your GP surgery. You do not have to wait until you are invited to make an appointment.

- **COVID-19**



You should have already had, or been offered, at least 2 doses of a COVID-19 **vaccine**.



People at risk of getting very ill from COVID-19 have been offered **boosters**. You should get an invite from your GP surgery if you need to have a COVID-19 **booster**.



A **booster** is another dose of a **vaccine**. This boosts protection from illnesses when the first **vaccines** start to wear off.



You may be offered other **vaccines**. This depends on your age, health conditions and lifestyle.



If you are unsure whether you should be getting a **vaccine**, contact your GP surgery.



It is important to get your **vaccines** when you are invited. Your healthcare professional should check you have had your flu **vaccine** during your [Annual Health Check](#).



If you are worried about getting a **vaccine**, speak to:

- your GP
- nurse
- or healthcare professional.

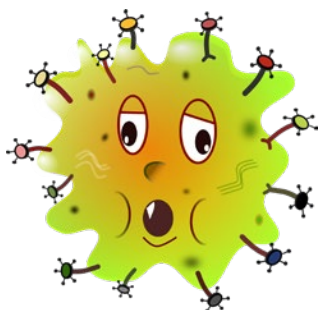
They can help you.

How vaccines work



Vaccines work by telling our **immune system** how to fight a disease.

Your **immune system** is the way your body fights diseases. It works to help stop you getting ill.



Vaccines have a small amount of very weak or dead germs in them.



Scientists make them weak or kill them. This stops them from causing harm.



Because the germs are very weak or dead, they cannot give you the disease.



Your **immune system** responds to the germs in the **vaccine** by:

- **Recognising it** – your body realises there is a new germ to deal with
- **Making antibodies** – these are the things in our body that fight the germs.
- **Remembering** the germs and how to fight them in the future.



It is safer for your **immune system** to learn this from a **vaccine**. Rather than by catching a disease.



All **vaccines** are tested before they are used. This is to make sure they will not harm you.



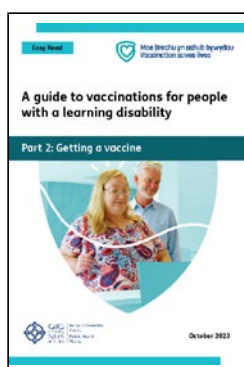
They are also constantly checked for **side effects**.



Side effects are when you take a medicine and it makes you feel ill.



Side effects do not happen to everyone. They are usually nothing to worry about and do not last long.



There is more about **side effects** in **part 2** of this guide.

Allergies



An **allergy** is when your body reacts to something badly. An **allergy** may cause things like sneezing and itching.



For a very small number of people an **allergy** can be very serious. It can cause swelling and trouble breathing.



In a tiny number of people an **allergy** can cause death. **It is very rare to have a serious allergy to vaccines.**



The person who gives your **vaccine** will know how to deal with the **allergy**. They will be able to treat it straight away.



Sometimes, people can be **allergic** to an ingredient in a **vaccine**.



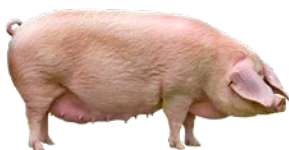
Some vaccines have ingredients to make them safe and help them work better. This can include:



- **Antibiotics** – (in tiny amounts). Helps stop germs growing in the **vaccine** when:
 - it is being made
 - and it is being stored.



- **Egg protein** – helps grow the germs needed to make the **vaccine** work.



- **Pork gelatine** – helps protect the **vaccine** and helps stop it going off.



Some people may be worried about **vaccine** ingredients because of:

- their diet
- or religion.



If you are worried about the ingredients, speak to the person giving you the **vaccine**.



You may still be able to have the **vaccine**.



Or get a **vaccine** that does not have ingredients you are worried about or **allergic** to.



Vaccines do not cause **allergies**.



If you are worried about getting a **vaccine**, speak to:

- your GP
- nurse
- or healthcare professional.

They can help you.

More information



Healthcare professionals are there to listen to you and support you. For example, your GP, nurse and pharmacist.

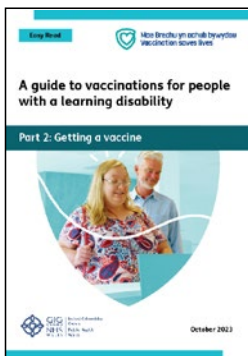


You can always talk to them if you need:

- more support
- information on **vaccines**
- information about having your **vaccinations**.



There is also easy read information about **vaccination** on the Public Health Wales website at: phw.nhs.wales/vaccines.



Please read **part 2** of this guide. It will give you information about getting a **vaccine**.

Hard words

Allergy

An allergy is when your body reacts to something badly. An allergy may cause things like sneezing and itching. For a very small number of people an allergy can be very serious. It can cause swelling and trouble breathing. In a tiny number of people an allergy can cause death. It is very rare to have a serious allergy to vaccines.

Booster

A booster is another dose of a vaccine. This boosts protection from illnesses when the first vaccines start to wear off.

Immune system

Your immune system is the way your body fights diseases. It works to help stop you getting ill.

Side effects

Side effects are when you take a medicine and it makes you feel ill. Side effects do not happen to everyone. They are usually nothing to worry about and do not last long.

Vaccination

Vaccination is the way we give someone a vaccine.

Vaccine

A vaccine is a medicine that helps your body fight diseases. It helps keep you safe from getting very ill. Most vaccines are given by injection. Sometimes people call them jabs.

Thank you to everyone that helped to make this guide. With special thanks to:

- Carmarthenshire People First
- Conwy Connect Forum
- Newport People First
- Learning Disability Wales
- Easy Read Wales
- Improvement Cymru

