

What should I do if I have unexpected or more serious side effects, or if my side effects do not go away?

Report any chest pain, numbness (tingling or burning), ulcers (sores), blisters, or skin rashes to your healthcare provider RIGHT AWAY. If these symptoms, or any other side effects such as muscle and/or joint aches, last for more than a few days or become severe, contact your healthcare provider RIGHT AWAY.

When you see your healthcare provider:

- LIST what vaccines you received.
- DESCRIBE when your symptoms started or got worse
- SEPARATE new symptoms from old health problems that may have gotten worse.

The vaccination may not be the cause of your symptoms. For example, a health problem unrelated to the vaccine, such as diabetes, lung disease, or infection might be causing symptoms that need medical treatment. On the other hand, if your symptoms are due to a vaccine, do not assume that serious or persistent side effects will go away if you just wait. You know your body – if you think that something is wrong, ask your healthcare provider to evaluate you. Medical treatment can make you more comfortable and may prevent more serious illness.

What is the Vaccine Healthcare Centers (VHC) Network?

The Department of Defense Healthcare System is committed to quality vaccination services and care. It established the VHC Network in 2001 to promote vaccination safety and to provide expert consultation for patients and providers, especially for side effects that are unexpected, prolonged, or serious. VHC experts care about your concerns and want to make sure that you get the proper treatment. The VHC Network provides clinical support

services, education, research, and quality improvement programs that enhance vaccine safety, efficacy, and acceptability.

What if I ask my healthcare provider about a side effect and am still concerned, or if I want to talk with a vaccine expert?

If you continue to have concerns or need additional help after an evaluation has been completed, you may:

- REQUEST referral to a specialist for the medical problem (such as an allergist for an allergic reaction or a dermatologist for a persistent rash).
- ASK your healthcare provider to contact the Vaccine Healthcare Centers (VHC) Network for vaccine safety expert consultation at www.vhcinfo.org, 1-202-782-0411, DSN 662-0411, or e-mail AskVHC@amedd.army.mil.
- CONTACT the VHC Clinical Call Center directly toll-free at **1-866-210-6469** or write your questions to AskVHC@amedd.army.mil.



Caring for Adverse Events After Vaccination

Do vaccines have side effects?

Vaccines are prescription drugs. Like all drugs, vaccines can cause side effects. Side effects after vaccination are common but usually not serious. Side effects affect some people and may interfere with work or play for a few days. More serious or long-lasting side effects, also known as vaccine adverse events, occur less commonly (or rarely).

Is there anything that I can do to prevent side effects after vaccination?

While most vaccine side effects are minor, you can help to prevent some of the more serious side effects if you:

- LEARN about the vaccine.
- ASK
 - o if there are any reasons why you should not receive the vaccine.
 - o what possible side effects need medical care and when to call the healthcare provider if they occur.

You can request more information from the Vaccine Healthcare Centers (VHC) Network by calling the Vaccine Clinical Call Center at **1-866-210-6469** (available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week), or by writing an e-mail to: AskVHC@amedd.army.mil.

How can I learn about the vaccines that I am going to get?

Ask your healthcare provider for vaccine-specific fact sheets. These fact sheets describe common and rare side effects, as well as the benefits of the vaccine. The fact sheets also describe reasons (contraindications) why certain people should not get a vaccine.

Fact sheets from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are called Vaccine Information Statements (VIS) found at www.cdc.gov/nip/publications/VIS/default.htm or www.immunize.org/vis/index.htm.

The Department of Defense (DoD) has similar brochures for vaccines such as anthrax and smallpox.

Clinics may provide additional information. Read the information carefully and save it in your personal records. If you think you should not get a vaccine, or that it might lead to a serious side effect, discuss this with your healthcare provider or contact the VHC Network before you are vaccinated.

What are expected side effects after vaccination?

The most common side effects are local (occur where the vaccine is injected). Local side effects include itching, burning, redness, minor swelling, and/or discomfort. Other common side effects may include headache, body aches, chills, fatigue, and muscle and/or joint aches. These short-term expected side effects do not pose a risk to your health and do not require a VAERS report. You can reduce aches, pains, and fever with Tylenol®, ibuprofen, or aspirin-like medications, unless you should avoid these drugs.

How can I make sure that my side effect is reported to people who monitor vaccine safety?

Side effects are also called adverse events. The CDC and Food and Drug Administration jointly manage the Vaccine Adverse Events Reporting System (VAERS). The main purpose of VAERS is to identify important new safety concerns and to ensure that the benefits of vaccines continue to be far greater than the risks. The VHC staff helps patients and healthcare workers to complete detailed VAERS reports. A detailed and accurate report of serious side effects after vaccination is important in monitoring vaccine safety. Even so, it may be impossible to prove or disprove that a vaccination caused any individual problem. Rare side effects may not have been recognized before a vaccine was licensed, because these side effects may occur only a few times for every million persons vaccinated. For more information about VAERS, go to: www.VAERS.org or call 1-800-822-7967. Your detailed reporting of adverse events helps to make the program better.

What if I am worried about getting the next dose in a vaccination series?

If you are due to receive another dose of a vaccine to which you had a previous reaction, tell your healthcare provider as soon as possible. Keep a written copy of your past medical evaluations and bring it to your healthcare provider's office. If, for some reason, you cannot be evaluated before the next vaccination is due, any healthcare provider can grant a temporary exemption for up to one year or until the final determination has been made about your case. If you disagree with the exemption decision, you have the right to request a referral to a medical specialist (policy letter at <http://demo.vaccines.mil/documents/446LearningfromAdverse.pdf>)

What are vaccine exemptions?

There are two kinds of vaccine exemptions (reasons for not receiving a vaccine or delaying the next dose): administrative and medical. Descriptions of these exemptions are available at: www.vaccines.mil and www.vhcinfo.org.

Reasons for exemptions include a:

- **CONDITION** (such as pregnancy or an acute illness) that might interfere with how the vaccine works.
- **CONTRAINDICATION**, which is a medical condition that increases the risk of a serious adverse event after a vaccination.

What happens if I receive a vaccine and then find out that I had a contraindication to that vaccine?

Tell your healthcare provider about the contraindication as soon as possible to see whether you need treatment. In most cases like this, the vaccinated person does well and has no serious problems. The contraindication should be evaluated and documented. A medical exemption should be recorded in your official record after the evaluation is completed. Before each vaccination you receive, during medical screening for contraindications, make sure you provide information about your other medical conditions, and any past history of adverse events with vaccines, drugs, or foods. For clinical consultation support for you, your family, or your healthcare provider WRITE to the e-mail address: **AskVHC@amedd.army.mil** or CALL **1-866-210-6469**. For more information about vaccine safety and adverse events: GO to www.VHCinfo.org, www.vaccines.mil, www.cdc.gov, and www.VAERS.org.