



## August is National Immunization Awareness Month

Vaccines are a breakthrough of modern medicine. Because of the efforts to vaccinate, smallpox was eradicated from the U.S. in 1949. Other serious diseases like polio are also nearing elimination. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has even estimated that vaccinations will prevent more than **21 million** hospitalizations and **732,000** deaths among children born in the last 20 years.

But vaccination has become a hot-button topic. Unfortunately, misinformation that associates vaccines with conditions like autism, disabilities, or other medical issues is one of the main reasons people are choosing not to vaccinate. There is no scientific evidence that supports these claims and much of the information that's shared online is inaccurate.

While the vaccination topic may seem complicated and controversial, it's important to understand how vaccines work. Unfortunately, there are many myths about vaccines, including what the term means. People often refer to shots, vaccinations, and [immunizations](#) as if they're the same. But a shot is not necessarily a vaccine.

**A shot** is one method that your doctor or care team could use to inject a helpful substance into your body. Depending on your needs, the shot could contain a medication like insulin or antibiotics. Vaccines are used to help prevent serious diseases or illnesses from happening or spreading. The vaccine itself is a safe substance that contains a small amount of a weakened or dead virus or bacteria. Some of the most common vaccines include: *Chickenpox, Flu (influenza), Hepatitis (A & B), Human Papillomavirus (HPV), Measles, mumps, rubella, Polio, Shingles, Tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis (whooping cough).*

**Immunization** is the process of becoming protected — or immune — to a disease or illness. When your body is exposed to a vaccine, your immune system will produce antibodies against that disease. Your body will then be able to recognize and fight the disease if you're ever exposed to it.

Talk to your doctor if you have any questions about vaccinations. You should also let your doctor know if you have any international travel coming up. They may recommend certain vaccines depending on your destination.

**Edward Kao, MD**

Physician-in-Chief

Kaiser Permanente South San Francisco Medical Center