Vaccines are important in helping prevent and lessen the effects of serious life-threatening diseases. There are more than 20 different vaccines available. Basically, vaccines contain killed or weakened germs that activate your immune system to build up antibodies against the disease. Most vaccines are injections, but some are given by mouth or sprayed into the nose. Some require more than one dose or even an occasional booster months to years later. Many vaccines are given to infants and children, while others are given later in life.

Similar to medicines, mistakes can also happen with vaccines. Mix-ups have occurred when a child received the wrong vaccine, the wrong formulation (adult instead of child), the wrong time (given too soon), or intended for a sibling. Errors have also occurred when adults received vaccines. Sometimes the same vaccine was given twice, the vaccine was not prepared correctly, or the wrong vaccine was given.

Preventing Errors When Receiving Vaccines

Here's What You Can Do:

Ask for information. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) requires healthcare practitioners to provide information about the vaccine to the patient/caregiver before the vaccine is given. The information is available on printed sheets called Vaccine Information Statements (VIS). These printed sheets are available on the CDC website (www.cdc.gov/vaccines/Pubs/vis/default.htm). If you are not given one, ask for one. Take time to read it before accepting the vaccine.

Ask to see the vial. Before accepting the vaccine, ask to see the vial to confirm the contents. Read the label name to make sure it is the vaccine you expect. You can compare the label to the VIS information sheet. If you are not sure it is the correct vaccine, say something!

Provide your birthdate (or your child’s birthdate if the vaccine is for your child). Make sure your healthcare provider knows your date of birth to determine how old you are. If the vaccine is for your child, make sure to ask the age requirements for the vaccine that is being given to your child. Confirm that your child is the right age for that vaccine.

Have separate appointments for family members. If both of your children are due for vaccines, schedule separate appointment times. Have one child get vaccinated at one time. Verify the information for each child right before the vaccine is given. You should follow the same process if both you and your child need a vaccine, or you and your spouse need a vaccine. Only one person should be vaccinated at a time.