

Getting the right care to keep your children healthy

Know which tests and treatments your kids need—and which ones they don't

Parents have more choices than ever about medical tests and treatments for their kids. But which ones are right for your child—and which ones might do more harm than good?

Here's a quick guide to some of the most common tests and treatments for children. It's based on advice from medical experts as part of the Choosing Wisely campaign. It can help you talk with the doctor about the care your kids need to stay healthy. It can also help you avoid care they may not need.

To learn more about keeping your children healthy, go to www.choosingwisely.org/patient-resources.



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5 medical tests and treatments your child needs

1 A flu shot each year.

This is one of the best ways to protect your child from the flu. And even if your child does get the flu, it will likely be milder. Everyone 6 months and older should get the flu shot each year by the end of October.



2 Routine shots on the suggested schedule.

Vaccines protect your child from deadly diseases. And the benefits far outweigh any risks. Your child's doctor should follow the suggested schedule of routine shots: [cdc.gov/vaccines/schedules](https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/schedules).

At each visit, ask if it's time for any of these shots or boosters:

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| Chickenpox (varicella): One or two doses; timing depends on your child's age |
| Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (DTaP): Five doses, starting at 2 months |
| Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib): Usually four doses, starting at 2 months |
| Hepatitis A: First of two doses between 12 and 23 months |
| Hepatitis B: Usually three doses, starting at birth |
| Human papillomavirus (HPV): Two doses for boys and girls starting at age 11 or 12 |
| Measles, mumps, rubella (MMR): First of two doses at 12 months |
| Meningococcal (MenACWY): First dose at age 11, with a booster later |
| Pneumococcal (PCV): Four doses, starting at 2 months |
| Polio (inactivated): Four doses, starting at 2 months |
| Rotavirus: Two or three doses, starting at 2 months |

3 Routine vision screenings.

Your child's doctor will do a routine vision screening as part of well-child visits. This test will occur each year or two, starting at about age 3.

If the doctor is concerned, he or she may send your child to an eye doctor. Most kids don't need a full exam by an eye doctor each year. Kids need this exam **only** if they fail a routine vision test, have a vision problem, or have a family history of vision or eye problems.



4 Spirometry test for asthma, if your child has symptoms.

Spirometry is a simple breathing test. It is done in a doctor's office. It measures how much air flows in and out of the lungs. Kids over age 5 should have this test if they have asthma symptoms. These include shortness of breath. If the doctor says your child has asthma, make sure he or she uses medicine as advised.



5 Antibiotics for infections caused by bacteria.

Antibiotics help treat some bacterial infections, such as strep throat. Strep throat does not cause all sore throats though. If your doctor thinks your child has strep throat, ask for a test.

Antibiotics may also be needed if your child has:

- > A cough that doesn't get better in 14 days
- > Symptoms of a sinus infection that don't ease within 10 days, or get better and then worse again
- > Whooping cough, **or**
- > Yellow-green discharge and a fever of at least 102° F for several days in a row

Your doctor may want to give your child swallowed antibiotics for swimmer's ear. But antibiotic eardrops may be safer and work better. The same is true for kids who have tubes in their ears.

5 medical tests and treatments to question

1 Antibiotics for infections caused by a virus.

Antibiotics should be taken only when they're needed. Otherwise, they may not work when they are needed. Plus, these drugs can cause side effects.

Antibiotics only fight bacteria. They don't work to treat viral infections, like colds, bronchitis, and most sinus infections.

In most cases, your child doesn't need antibiotics for pink eye, either. It's often caused by a virus or an allergic reaction. Even when pink eye is caused by bacteria, it usually clears up in about 10 days without drugs.

2 CT scans for head injuries.

A CT scan is a type of X-ray. It uses radiation, which can increase the risk of cancer, especially in kids.

If your child bumps his or her head, the doctor should not order a CT scan right away. Instead, the doctor should first check your child and ask about the injury and symptoms. Even if the doctor thinks your child has a mild concussion, a CT scan is not likely to be helpful. CT scan results are usually normal in people with concussions.

The doctor should order a CT scan if your child:

- Fell down more than five stairs
- Fell from a height of more than 3 feet
- Fell off a bike without a helmet, **or**
- Was in a car accident

Your child may also need a CT scan if he or she:

- Feels very dizzy, sleepy, confused, **or** grumpy
- Has a headache that gets worse
- Has loss of balance, hearing, or vision
- Has tingling on one side of the body
- Passes out, **or**
- Throws up or feels queasy

See a doctor right away if your child has any of these symptoms—even hours or days after the injury.

3 Random allergy tests.

Random allergy tests usually don't help. Screenings may use the wrong type of test. Or they may detect allergies that kids don't really have. These false alarms can lead to unneeded costs and lifestyle changes.

If your child has symptoms—such as sneezing, runny nose, rash, headache, or swelling—talk to your child's doctor. Ask about self-help steps and over-the-counter drugs. Try these before having allergy tests.

4 Drugs for sleep problems.

When kids have trouble sleeping, their parents may give them drugs to help them sleep. These include antihistamines and sleep aids. In fact, these drugs can make it harder for kids to sleep. Some of them have not been approved for use in kids. And there is a risk of overdose.

Instead of using drugs, ask your child's doctor about non-drug ways to improve your child's sleep.

5 Tests teens usually don't need.

A **scoliosis test** checks for an abnormal curve of the spine. This test is not very accurate. And most scoliosis is so mild that it does not cause problems or need treatment. If your child's back has a severe curve, he or she might need the test.

A **Pap test** checks cells in the cervix for signs of cancer. It's usually part of a pelvic exam. Teenage girls don't need Pap tests. That's because they are very unlikely to have cervical cancer.