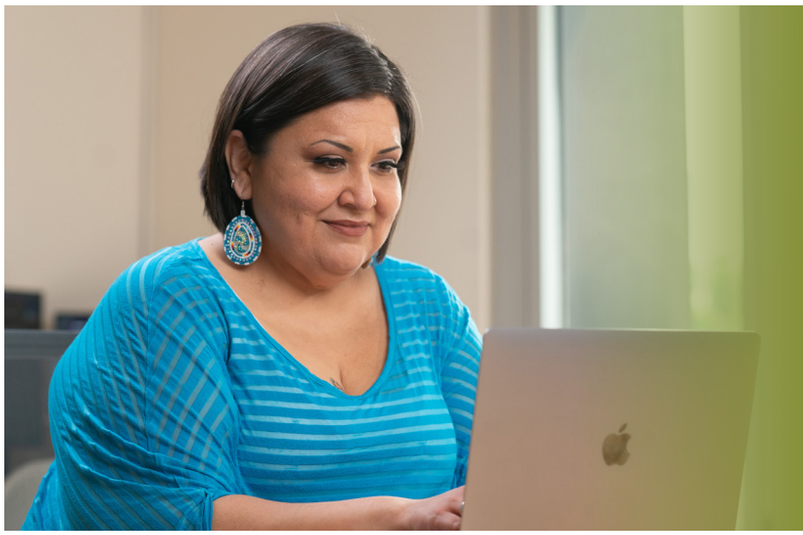
VACCINATIVE | Vaccination information for Natives by Natives

Vaccine Safety



Vaccine safety is a hot topic these days. And many of us want to know more. This handout is designed to help you weigh important vaccine safety decisions so you can take care of yourself and your community.

"Vaccines save lives in Tribal communities every day. When I think of not having access to vaccines and all of the precious Indigenous knowledge that could be lost, I find this unacceptable! Our people are sacred."

– Dr. Maxine Brings Him Back-Janis, Ed.D, MPH, RDH, Oglala Lakota, Professor and Heritage University President's Liaison on Native American Affairs

Vaccines

Within our bodies, each of us has warrior cells that stand guard against diseases. Vaccines help our warrior cells see and fight disease. For example, when we get the flu shot, the ingredients in the shot tell our warrior cells how to recognize and fight the flu. That is why if you get a flu shot, you are less likely to get sick with the flu. Getting vaccinated can also reduce the seriousness of illness if you happen to get sick.

Vaccine Testing

Each vaccine goes through many rounds of safety tests, which may take years and thousands of volunteers. During vaccine testing, important questions are considered, like "Is the vaccine safe?" and "How does the body react to it?"

Vaccine Side Effects

Vaccine testing also helps us learn about possible side effects. Most vaccines have mild side effects, like fever or soreness, that go away in a few days. Mild side effects are a sign that your warrior cells are preparing to be able to recognize and fight disease.

If side effects from a vaccine are found to be serious during testing, the vaccine will not be approved.

"The simplest way to help each other and the community is by getting vaccinated. Vaccinations are protective. They also allow our bodies to overcome disease in a shorter amount of time. This, in turn, lowers the risk of spreading diseases to our most vulnerable – like our Elderly or infants."

– Dr. Craig Verdin, MD and United Houma Nation Tribal Member

"Tribes and Native people have helped at every step in fighting against diseases through doing things like participating in vaccine trials. At Lummi Nation we participated in the Novavax vaccine trials. We are proud to have participated in this effort, but more importantly we are proud of our people."

- Nick Lewis, Lummi Nation Tribal Leader

Vaccine Approval

Many teams of doctors and vaccine experts review all of the available information gathered during testing. After doing this, they recommend whether or not a particular vaccine should be approved for public use.

After approval some vaccines may have rare but potentially serious side effects. That is why we continue to monitor vaccines even after they are approved.

Vaccine Monitoring

After a vaccine is approved, everyday people who got the vaccine can share how it made them feel. If you experience anything beyond common side effects, please seek medical attention. When you do, make sure that the health provider reports your experience to the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS). If you are uncertain whether your experience was reported, you can file a report at www.VAERS.hhs.gov.

Continued monitoring helps assure any unforeseen risks are quickly identified. Because the process involves people from different backgrounds, this process helps ensure that vaccines are safe for everyone.

Where to Get Vaccinated

To get vaccinated contact your local Tribal clinic, IHS facility, or visit a local pharmacy or clinic.

VacciNative

This handout was developed by VacciNative – a project dedicated to creating accurate vaccine information for Native people by Native people. We do this by gathering info from trusted Elders, Native health professionals, and other experts.

All of our materials are reviewed by the VacciNative Alliance, a collaboration of staff from Tribal Epidemiology Centers across the nation.

Additional Information

For additional information, check out www.IndianCountryECHO.org/VacciNative.
For questions, contact us at VacciNative@npaihb.org.

"I got meningitis young when there were no vaccines to prevent it. After getting sick, I had brain damage and started having regular seizures. But meningitis is not just a childhood disease. It follows you through life. It disrupted me from going to college and having children. It effects my memory, and it limits my ability to pursue things that I enjoy."

- Toni Royal, Elder and Quinault Tribal Member

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