

August is National Immunization Awareness Month (NIAM)

Vaccines are safe and effective at preventing specific diseases. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research (CBER) is responsible for approving and regulating vaccines in the United States. FDA only approves and licenses a vaccine if it is shown to be safe and effective, the benefit of the vaccine outweighs its possible side effects, and the benefit of receiving the vaccine outweighs the risk associated with the disease it is meant to prevent. Want more information about CBER? See <https://www.fda.gov/about-fda/office-medical-products-and-tobacco/about-center-biologics-evaluation-and-research-cber>.

Once a vaccine receives FDA approval, it is submitted to a group from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) known as the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). ACIP's medical and public health experts carefully review data about the vaccine and develop recommendations regarding its use. They monitor the vaccine's safety and effectiveness after it is in routine use, and modify recommendations based on that data. Each year, ACIP updates its recommendations for the use of common vaccines in children, adolescents and adults (see <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/acip/index.html>).

Multiple systems monitor the ongoing safety and effectiveness of vaccines once approved by FDA. The Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS), the Vaccine Safety Datalink (VSD) and Post-Licensure Rapid Immunization Safety Monitoring (PRISM), and the Clinical Immunization Safety Assessment Project (CISA) are all systems that collect and analyze data regarding the use of all vaccines.

Vaccines are generally recommended for people either based on their age or medical conditions they have. For example, it is recommended that children get vaccinated against measles, mumps, rubella, polio, chickenpox and other illnesses. Some vaccines, such as the one for shingles, are recommended for adults over a certain age. Regarding medical conditions, an example is that people who have hepatitis C infection are advised to be immunized against hepatitis A and hepatitis B.

The Rappahannock Area Health District (RAHD) provides vaccines to uninsured and insured persons of all ages. All health departments in RAHD have vaccines required for school entry as well as ACIP-recommended vaccines.

RAHD holds walk-in immunization clinics each week at each health department. Patient are seen on a first come, first served basis. Immunization clinic schedules are:

Caroline County Health Department	Wednesday	8 am – 12 pm
Fredericksburg City Health Department	Tuesday	8 am – 12 pm
King George County Health Department	Tuesday	8 am – 12 pm
Spotsylvania County Health Department	Monday	8 am – 12 pm
Stafford County Health Department	Fridays	8 am – 12 pm

If you have questions regarding immunizations for yourself or a loved one, please contact Carolyn Garcia, RN (RAHD Immunization Coordinator) at 540-322-5943 or by email at Carolyn.Garcia@vdh.virginia.gov.

For more information about National Immunization Awareness Month, see <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/events/niam.html> or <https://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/immunizations/Pages/National-Immunization-Awareness-Month.aspx>.