

What You Need to Know About Vaccine Ingredients

Clear information empowers people to learn more about vaccines and make informed health decisions. Here's a look at the types of vaccine ingredients and why they're important.

What's in a vaccine?



Antigens

What they are: antigens are the active ingredients in vaccines that train your body to recognize and fight disease – like a harmless protein from the flu virus.

Example: a protein from the whooping cough (pertussis) bacteria helps the body build protection without causing illness

Why they're in vaccines: to train your immune system to recognize and fight the disease later



Adjuvants

What they are: ingredients that boost your immune system's response to a vaccine

Example: tiny amounts of aluminum salts that help the body build strong protection with a smaller dose

Why they're in vaccines: to help your body build stronger, longer-lasting protection at a lower vaccine dose



Stabilizers

What they are: ingredients that protect a vaccine's active ingredients during storage and handling

Example: gelatin, which helps prevent the vaccine from breaking down if heated or shaken

Why they're in vaccines: to ensure vaccines still work right when given, even after storage or transport



Preservatives

What they are: ingredients that prevent bacteria or fungi from growing while vaccines are stored

Example: tiny organic chemical compounds that stop germs from growing in multi-dose vials

Why they're in vaccines: to keep multi-dose vaccines safe and effective by preventing contamination that could occur each time a needle is inserted into the vial

Vaccines include ingredients needed to make them work safely and provide long-lasting protection against disease. And before any vaccine is given to someone, they are extensively reviewed and tested to ensure they are safe and effective.