



Protecting Your Baby From the Very Beginning

August is National Immunization Awareness Month, a time to highlight the important role vaccines play in keeping babies healthy and protected as they grow.

From the moment your baby is born, their immune system is still developing. Vaccinations help build protection against serious illnesses before babies are exposed to them. By following the recommended immunization schedule, parents can help safeguard their child from diseases that once caused widespread illness and hospitalization.



Routine well-baby visits are the perfect opportunity to talk with your child's healthcare provider about recommended vaccines, ask questions, and ensure your baby is growing and developing as expected. These visits also allow providers to monitor your child's health, offer guidance on nutrition and development, and address any concerns you may have as a parent.

Simple Ways to Stay on Track



Schedule your baby's next well-child visit before leaving the doctor's office.



Keep an up-to-date record of your child's immunizations.



Bring your questions to each appointment—your healthcare provider is there to help.



If your baby misses a scheduled vaccine, contact your provider about getting back on track.

Celebrating National Breastfeeding Month: Supporting Healthy Beginnings

August is National Breastfeeding Month, a time to recognize the many benefits of breastfeeding and to celebrate the parents, families, and communities that support healthy beginnings for babies.

Breastfeeding provides important nutrients and antibodies that help protect babies from illness while supporting healthy growth and development. It also offers opportunities for close physical contact that can strengthen the bond between parent and child. For many families, breastfeeding can provide health benefits for the nursing parent as well.



Every family's feeding journey is unique. While some parents breastfeed exclusively, others combine breastfeeding with formula, pump breast milk, or make different feeding choices based on their family's needs or medical circumstances. The most important thing is that babies are fed, loved, and cared for in a safe and nurturing environment.

Whether you're breastfeeding, pumping, formula feeding, or using a combination of methods, know that caring for your baby with love and responsiveness is what matters most. Building a strong, nurturing relationship through feeding, cuddling, talking, and comforting helps your baby feel safe and secure.

If you are expecting a baby or have recently welcomed one into your family, remember that it's okay to ask for help. Learning to breastfeed can take time, patience, and practice. Lactation consultants, healthcare providers, and your Healthy Families Family Support Specialist can offer guidance and encouragement if you encounter challenges.

Tips for a Successful Start to Breastfeeding

- Feed your baby whenever they show early hunger cues, such as rooting, sucking on their hands, or smacking their lips.
- Find a comfortable position that works for both you and your baby.
- Stay hydrated and eat a balanced diet to support your own health.
- Reach out for support if breastfeeding is uncomfortable or you have concerns.
- Give yourself grace—every feeding journey is different.



StartSmart is designed to share practical tips and advice each month to help you nurture your baby's growth and development. From encouraging milestones to promoting healthy habits, *StartSmart* is here to support you every step of the way on your parenting journey!

StartSmart: Learning is Everywhere!

You don't need expensive toys or special activities to help your baby learn. Every conversation, cuddle, and new experience helps build your child's growing brain. One of the easiest ways to encourage learning is to explore the world together.

Take your baby outside for a short walk or spend a few minutes sitting under a shady tree. Talk about everything you see, hear, and feel:

- "The leaves are green."
- "Can you hear the birds singing?"
- "The breeze feels cool."
- "Look at the fluffy white clouds!"



Even before babies understand words, they are listening, learning, and making connections. Hearing your voice helps build language skills, while experiencing different sights, sounds, and textures encourages healthy brain development.

Remember, your baby doesn't need a perfect outing—they simply need *you*. Your attention, conversation, and love are the most powerful learning tools they have.

Start Smart Tip: The best learning happens during everyday moments. Talking, reading, singing, and exploring together help build the strong foundation your child needs for lifelong learning.



Important dates this month:

School starts:

August 5 Orange County
August 11 Madison County
August 12 Rappahannock County
Fauquier County