

## Topic of the Month

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Free - Help Yourself!

*Just when you think they're gone for good - they're baaaaack.*

### Zombie Infections

Actually [latent infections](#), these zombies lie dormant in a person's body, hiding from the immune system, and often cause no symptoms. They can be difficult or impossible to treat.

#### Latent Viral Infections

[Herpes Simplex Virus \(HSV\)](#) - Commonly referred to as simply "herpes," this virus can cause sores on or in the mouth or genitals, and is spread through direct physical contact. After the first infection, the virus lies dormant in the body for the rest of a person's lifetime. It will occasionally flare up, causing symptoms such as cold sores (aka "fever blisters") or genital sores. If someone is healthy and not pregnant, there aren't any serious health risks, but there can be times of serious discomfort.

[Varicella Zoster Virus \(VZV\)](#) - This is the virus that causes chickenpox and shingles. It's highly contagious and remains in the body for a lifetime. It can be dangerous, even deadly, especially for babies, pregnant people, or people with weakened immune systems. It also causes the painful blistering condition called "[shingles](#)." The risks of getting shingles and having complications increases with age. One in 10 people that get shingles will go on to develop nerve pain that last months (or even years) after the rash disappears.

[Human Immunodeficiency Virus \(HIV\)](#) - This virus impacts a person's immune system and makes them less able to fight off infections and other diseases. It can lead to the development of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). There are medications that can prevent the virus from replicating. They can slow or stop the disease from getting worse, but it's also possible for the virus to hide out and then reactivate in the future.

[Human Papillomavirus \(HPV\)](#) - HPV is the most common sexually transmitted infection in the US. There are multiple strains, and they can cause health issues such as genital warts and cancer.



[Hepatitis C](#) - Hep C is a bloodborne virus that injures the [liver](#). It can be acute or chronic, and you might not notice symptoms until after the damage is done. Luckily it can be cured most of the time, so screening is important to stop this zombie in its tracks before it causes cirrhosis or liver cancer.

#### Latent Bacterial Infections

[Tuberculosis \(TB\)](#) - This airborne bacteria can lead to illness upon infection, and then lie in wait for a lifetime. If not treated correctly, TB can be serious, or even fatal.

#### Latent Parasitic Infections

[Toxoplasma gondii](#) is the most common parasitic infection. When active in the body, it causes the condition called toxoplasmosis. Infection occurs by eating undercooked contaminated meat, exposure to the feces of an infected cat, or from mother to child during pregnancy. Most people don't exhibit any symptoms, but T. gondii can cause serious complications for people with weakened immune systems or babies born to infected mothers.

#### Protecting yourself from zombies

For chickenpox, shingles, and HPV, there's a safe and effective way to make sure that you or your children don't have to fight off zombie attackers, now or in the future - **Vaccination!** The chickenpox vaccine protects kids while they're young, and it also protects them from shingles when they're older. HPV vaccination slashes the chances of a child ever developing cervical cancer. There is a vaccine against TB, but because it causes a positive TB skin test, its use is controversial. It's not often given in the US.

There's currently no vaccine for Herpes or HIV. Protect yourself from Herpes by avoiding intimate contact (kissing or sex) during an outbreak. HIV can only spread if bodily fluids are shared. This is prevented by correctly using condoms and refraining from sharing injection drug equipment. Toxoplasmosis can be prevented by making sure produce and kitchen utensils are washed, meat is thoroughly cooked, and cat litter boxes are only cleaned by people that are not at risk for complications.

Taking care of ourselves can take a lot of support. We're here to help!  
Ask a nurse or provider if you'd like to talk. 218-387-2330



The thought of infections reanimating themselves inside our bodies and wreaking havoc on our health is scary! It makes good sense to take preventive measures to protect ourselves and our families. On the flip side though, are things that are protective but have gotten an undeserved bad reputation. This can lead some people to be afraid of things that are actually helpful.

#### **DEET**

Available since 1957, [DEET is the standard](#) against which all other insect repellents are measured. It repels multiple biting insects, including mosquitos, ticks, flies, and fleas. Although the ways it works are still being studied, what is well understood is DEET's high level of safety. Between the early 1980s and late 1990s, there were 14 reported cases of brain damage in children that *might* have been caused by DEET exposure. This caused concerns that still linger today. What is not often considered are the *100 million annual applications* of DEET that were made during that same time. Problems associated with DEET are almost exclusively caused by misuse - either not following usage directions or ingestion. When used **correctly**, there are virtually no health hazards from DEET, for either adults or children.

#### **Fluoride**

Fluoride is a naturally occurring mineral that's found in varying amounts in water sources and some foods. It's also added to dental hygiene products and to many municipal water systems. [Fluoride helps protect against cavities in two ways.](#) First, before a child's teeth erupt through the gums, fluoride enables the tooth enamel to better develop. This is called a "systemic" benefit. Later, after teeth are through the gums, the fluoride in dental products and drinking water helps to rebuild (remineralize) weakened enamel and can reverse early signs of decay. This is called a "topical" benefit. The tiny amount added to municipal drinking water is safe for everyone from newborns to elders. There is [no evidence of any negative health effects](#) either from

water fluoridation programs or from the use of fluoridated dental products. It's impossible to over-fluoridate yourself with optimally fluoridated drinking water, but dental products are more concentrated. Because of that, small children should always be supervised while brushing to ensure they don't eat or drink fluoridated dental products. *Hint:* Don't rinse your mouth after brushing! Leave the fluoride on your teeth and let it get to work.

#### **Thimerosal**

[Thimerosal](#) is a substance that preserves vaccines and prevents them from becoming contaminated with microbes. Its full name is Ethylmercury (EtHg), and it's very different from its cousin, Methylmercury (MeHg). Methyl is produced by microbes from the naturally-occurring element mercury and is found throughout the environment. It's poisonous and can build up in our food. That's why we should limit our consumption of certain types of fish. Ethyl, on the other hand, has very low toxicity and is rapidly metabolized and excreted from our bodies. Its safety has been researched for decades, and there is no link between its use and any type of health problem.

This is similar to another Methyl/Ethyl family: Methyl alcohol and Ethyl alcohol. Methyl alcohol is poisonous and is used to make antifreeze. Ingesting even one tablespoon of it can be lethal. Ethyl alcohol is found in beverages such as beer and wine. When consumed by adults in small quantities, its toxicity is low.

#### **Receiving Multiple Vaccines At The Same Time**

Antigens are foreign substances that cause an immune response in our bodies. This can include germs or vaccines. The number of antigens that are found in any combination of vaccines is minuscule compared to the number of antigens that we encounter on a daily basis - just by eating, breathing, and moving around in our germ-covered world.

The [recommended vaccine schedule](#) for children is based on two factors:

1. The age at which the immune system can best provide protection after vaccination.
2. The need to protect children as early as possible based on the risks of that disease.

There are [advantages to combining vaccines](#):

1. Multiple vaccines at once offer both children and adults quicker protection from multiple diseases.
2. Giving several shots at the same time means fewer trips to the clinic, saving time, money, and hassle.

[Vaccines are safe and effective](#), and the approved schedules and combinations have been carefully developed to provide maximum protection. If you've got questions, just contact your SMC provider! They're happy to answer your questions about vaccines, product safety, or infectious diseases. Call 218-387-2330.