

VACCINATION PROTECTS!

You and your family!

A big5health campaign to mark the
European Immunisation Week

19th – 25th April 2026



In cooperation with:



Editorial

Dear Reader,

Health is our most precious asset – and vaccinations are one of the simplest and most effective ways to protect it. Unfortunately, there is a lot of misinformation and myths that can lead people to choose not to vaccinate themselves or their children. It is therefore important to us and our partners to provide you with clear, understandable and trustworthy information. Why? **Because every vaccination counts – for you, for your family and for our community.**

In this brochure you will find:

- **Up-to-date facts on vaccinations** – from HPV and pneumococcal disease to RSV and COVID-19.
- **Practical tips** on how you can easily manage your vaccination protection in everyday life – including an e-vaccination record.
- **Scientifically backed answers** to common questions and myths.
- **Personal vaccination checks**, so you always know whether you and your loved ones are fully protected.

Vaccinations save lives. They protect not only ourselves, but also those who cannot be vaccinated, such as infants or people with weakened immune systems. Together, we can push back against disease and make our society healthier.

We would like to thank all the experts who are supporting this campaign. We would particularly like to thank the Austrian Society for General and Family Medicine (ÖGAM), the Federal State of Salzburg – especially the Provincial Health Directorate – and the Karl Landsteiner Institute for Lung Research and Pneumological Oncology for their valuable work.

Your health is important to us! Use this brochure as a guide to a long, healthy and carefree life.

Your team at big5health

big5health



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Why get vaccinated?

Imagine if you could protect your family, your friends and yourself from many serious illnesses with a simple measure. That is exactly what vaccinations do! They are like an invisible shield – they protect us from dangerous infections, save lives and ensure that we stay healthy.

Every vaccination is a step towards safety: For you, for your children, for your parents and for everyone you care about – because when we get vaccinated, we protect not only ourselves, but also those who may not (yet) be able to be vaccinated, such as infants or people with weakened immune systems.

„Vaccination is the only scientifically proven preventive measure that has been shown to protect against serious and potentially life-threatening diseases!“



Dr. Stephanie Poggenburg

1st Vice-President of the Austrian Society
for General and Family Medicine

How do vaccines work?

Vaccinations are like a gentle training for your immune system. They prepare your body to recognise and fight off pathogens – without you actually having to get sick. This means you will be fully prepared should you ever come into contact with the real pathogen.

Imagine your body has internal guardians who are always ready to protect you from intruders. Vaccines strengthen these health guardians and ensure that you stay healthy – for your whole life.

This training works in different ways depending on the vaccine:

- Live vaccines contain highly attenuated pathogens
- Inactivated vaccines contain inactivated (dead) parts of the pathogen
- mRNA/vector vaccines use genetic information from the pathogen. The body is shown a “blueprint” for a small part of the virus. This teaches the immune system to recognise the virus and fight it off.

„The safety of vaccines is guaranteed by years of research, rigorous clinical trials and continuous monitoring. Every vaccine which comes onto the market has come a long way – **for your safety.**“



Dr. Petra Gruber-Juhász

Head of the Salzburg Provincial Health Directorate

Vaccine safety

Vaccines are the result of careful research and undergo rigorous testing procedures before they are approved. This ensures that they are not only effective, but also safe.

It is a long journey from the initial idea for a vaccine to its approval:

1. Before the vaccine can be tested on humans, it is tested in the laboratory and on animals.
2. The vaccine is then tested on a small group of volunteers. If all goes well, it is
3. tested on a larger group in order to determine the optimal dose and identify any potential side effects. Only once everything is in order at this stage, the vaccine is administered to thousands of people to further test its efficacy and safety. This can take several years.
4. Only once all these steps have been successfully completed, independent authorities, such as the European Medicines Agency (EMA) or the Federal Office for Safety and Health (BASG) review the data. The vaccine is only authorised if it meets all requirements.
5. Even after approval, the vaccine is constantly monitored. Doctors and scientists report any potential side effects to the authorities in order to ensure continued safety.

Special case: the COVID-19 vaccine

The COVID-19 vaccines were needed very quickly during the pandemic. In order to achieve this, scientists drew on existing knowledge about coronaviruses and vaccine development. In addition, companies and research institutions invested more money and personnel in the development process. Furthermore, the individual steps required for approval were carried out in parallel. This meant that a vaccine could be developed much more quickly, whilst still adhering to the same strict safety requirements which apply to all vaccines.

The Austrian vaccination schedule

In Austria, there is a clear vaccination schedule that shows you which vaccinations are recommended at what age. Thanks to the free childhood vaccination programme, many are free for both children and adults. Together with the Ministry of Health, the experts of the National Vaccination Committee work on this schedule and update it annually in order to incorporate the latest scientific findings.

Whether standard vaccinations, such as measles or tetanus or specific vaccinations for certain stages of life – the vaccination schedule is your personal guide to a healthy life.

With this schedule in hand, you can be ensured that you and your family are optimally protected. Take advantage of this opportunity – for a life with fewer worries and a better quality of life! Your trusted doctor can support you here and provide detailed advice on the recommended vaccinations.



Take a look now at
www.sozialministerium.gv.at/impfplan



„When it comes to vaccination in particular, we still have a long way to go in terms of patient education and vaccination coverage.“



Dr. Susanne Rabady

2nd Vice-President of the Austrian Society
for General and Family Medicine

Vaccination campaigns 2026

Vaccinations are one of the best ways to protect yourself against any serious illnesses. In 2026, there will be special campaigns where you can get vaccinated free of charge. Here you will find all the important information about the current vaccinations.

HPV vaccination

Cancer prevention for children and young adults

HPV, short for human papillomavirus, can cause pre-cancerous lesions and cancer. These are transmitted through sexual contact and can cause cervical cancer, penile cancer, anal cancer and also cancer of the mouth and throat. Certain types of the virus can also cause unpleasant genital warts.

The vaccination provides very good protection against these diseases. Parents who wish to protect their children should ideally do so from the child's 9th birthday onwards.

Current offer:

- Until June 2026, all 21 - 30-year-olds can receive their second dose free of charge if they had received their first dose before December 2025.
- Take the opportunity to protect your children early – the vaccination is free for everyone from their 9th to their 21st birthday!

Where can I get the vaccination?

- At participating doctors' surgeries
- At participating public vaccination centres
- In some cases, as part of school vaccination programmes.



Pneumococcal vaccination

Protection for the lungs and heart

Pneumococci are bacteria that can cause severe pneumonia, meningitis and blood poisoning. These infections can be life-threatening, particularly for older people and those with underlying health conditions. The bacteria can also be dangerous for infants and children under the age of 5.

Did you know?

The pneumococcal vaccination not only protects against pneumonia, but also reduces the risk of heart attacks and strokes following an infection. It also protects against long-term consequences such as chronic lung diseases.

Current campaigns

- Free vaccination for everyone aged 60 and over – take advantage now! The new vaccine covers more serotypes – previous vaccinations are not relevant.
- The vaccination is part of the free childhood immunisation programme and is free for all children from 7 weeks of age up to their 6th birthday.

Where can I get the vaccination?

- At participating doctors' surgeries
- In some federal states, at district administrative offices and municipal authorities

„Pneumococci are always in season! Take advantage of the free vaccination in order to protect yourself and your lungs“



Senior Lecturer, PhD Arschang Valipour

Lung specialist at the Karl Landsteiner Institute for Lung Research and Pneumological Oncology

RSV vaccination

Protection against severe respiratory diseases

The respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) can be particularly dangerous for babies, young children and the elderly, leading to severe pneumonia and even death. In children, RSV infections are the number one cause of hospital admissions during the winter months. The RSV vaccination protects against hospitalisation and severe illness.

Babies born between October and March are at the highest risk of severe illness. As there are no vaccines available for children, they are protected through passive immunisation. This involves children receiving ready-made antibodies – unlike with vaccinations, where the body first has to develop these defences (see explanation on page 4). This is best done whilst still in hospital. For all children born between April and September, RSV immunisation is recommended in October.

From the age of 65, the risk of severe RSV disease increases again. Therefore, vaccination is also recommended from this age onwards.

Current offers:

- The RSV vaccination is part of the free childhood vaccination programme and is therefore free of charge for babies.

Where can you get the vaccination?

- At public and private hospitals and maternity clinics participating in the free vaccination programme
- At participating paediatricians' practices

Shingles vaccination

(herpes zoster)

Protection against painful consequences

Shingles (herpes zoster) is caused by the varicella-zoster virus – the same virus that causes chickenpox. A typical symptom of the condition is a band-like rash of blisters, resembling a belt.

In older people, shingles can lead to severe, difficult-to-treat pain, nerve damage and long-term complications. These include the risk of going blind and developing encephalitis. The risk of heart attack and stroke also increases! The vaccination reduces this risk by over 90%.

The vaccination is therefore particularly recommended for people aged 60 and over, immunocompromised individuals and those with chronic or chronic inflammatory conditions.

Did you know?

Shingles occurs much less frequently in people who have been vaccinated against varicella (chickenpox) than in those who have not been vaccinated. A varicella vaccination is therefore not only beneficial for preventing chickenpox in children. Even as they get older, these people have a lower risk of developing shingles!

Current offers:

- The shingles vaccination is free for everyone aged 60 and over.
- People aged 18 and over, who are at increased risk of developing the disease, can also be vaccinated free of charge.

Where can I get the vaccine?

- At participating doctors' surgeries
- In some federal states, at facilities run by district administrative authorities and municipal authorities

COVID-19 vaccination

The COVID-19 vaccination helps to protect against severe illness and hospitalisation. If you do become ill despite being vaccinated, the illness is usually shorter and milder. The vaccination also reduces the risk of passing the virus on to others.

The vaccine is recommended for everyone aged 12 and over. However, younger children from the age of 6 months can also be vaccinated.

The COVID-19 vaccine is free of charge.

Did you know?

With the new vaccines, a single dose is now sufficient to protect against severe illness!

Where can you get the vaccine?

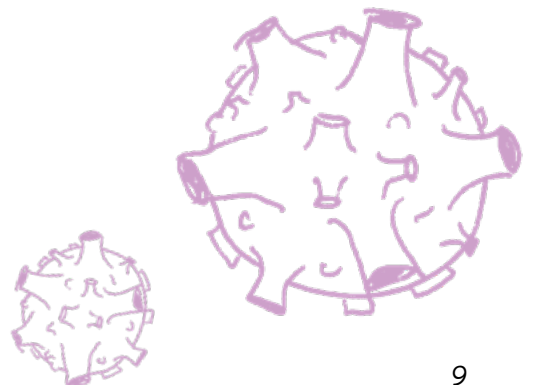
- At many doctors' surgeries
- As part of vaccination programmes in your federal state



„The COVID-19 vaccine remains a key component in preventing severe illness.“

Dr. Petra Gruber-Juhász

Head of the Salzburg State Health Directorate



Fact check:

So you don't fall for myths

Myth:

The COVID-19 vaccine is a form of gene therapy.

Fact:

Messenger RNA (mRNA) is a component of our cells; without it, they would not function. Our DNA (our genes), which contains the blueprints for proteins, is located in the cell nucleus. These proteins are then built in the cytoplasm, which surrounds the cell nucleus. And this is where mRNA comes into play: it delivers the blueprints to the “builders” (enzymes) in the cytoplasm. It does not work the other way round; in other words, mRNA cannot carry information into the cell nucleus. Therefore, it can never influence our genes.

Myth:

Side effects of vaccinations are covered up.

Fact:

Vaccines are strictly monitored – both before and after approval. Every possible side effect is documented and reviewed by independent authorities such as the EMA (European Medicines Agency) or the BASG (Federal Office for Safety in Healthcare). All data is publicly available.

This transparency ensures that vaccines are constantly improved and that you can rely on their safety.

Myth:

A natural infection is better than a vaccination.

Fact:

Vaccines are only approved once the risk of potential complications is much lower than the benefits.

A natural infection can lead to severe illness, complications and long-term effects. In the case of measles, these include, for example, encephalitis; in the case of polio – as the name suggests – paralysis. Measles can also destroy existing immune protection against other diseases. This means that you not only have to endure the measles itself, but afterwards also suffer from diseases against which you already had “defences” in your blood.

Extra bit of knowledge:

Thanks to vaccination programmes, many diseases have been reduced so significantly over the past decades that we are no longer really aware of their serious consequences today. This may give the impression that vaccinations are dangerous and that their minor risks seem threatening. But in reality, there would be a resurgence of many dangerous infections if fewer and fewer people were to get vaccinated.

Myth:

Vaccinations are administered far too early to infants and children.

Fact:

The childhood vaccination schedule is designed to protect children from dangerous diseases as early as possible. Infants and young children are particularly vulnerable to severe forms of diseases such as whooping cough, measles or pneumococcal disease.

This is why vaccinations are given so early:

- Babies do not yet have a fully developed immune system – vaccinations help to protect them until their bodies become stronger.
- Childhood illnesses, such as measles can cause serious complications (e.g. pneumonia or encephalitis).
- Early vaccinations protect not only the child, but also siblings, parents and grandparents.

What parents should know:

- Vaccines for children are specifically tailored to their age and are administered in small, safe doses.
- No overload: Children come into contact with far more antigens every day than they do through vaccinations – their immune system is designed to cope with this.

„Vaccinations for children are like a protective shield – they safeguard them against diseases that could endanger their lives.“

Dr. Stephanie Poggenburg

1st Vice-President of the Austrian Society for General Practice and Family Medicine

Myth:

Vaccines cause autism.

Fact:

This myth stems from a fraudulent study from 1998, which has been scientifically debunked. It was later revealed that the doctor who published the study had a financial interest in spreading this misinformation. Numerous large-scale studies involving millions of participants have found no link between vaccinations and autism. Vaccinations are safe and save lives.

This example illustrates very well how misinformation can unsettle parents and lead to children not being vaccinated, even though it has long been established that the vaccine is safe.

Myth:

Vaccinations lead to infertility..

Fact:

There is no scientific evidence that vaccinations affect fertility. This myth is often spread through misinformation on social media, but it has no basis in medicine. Studies show that vaccinated people are just as fertile as unvaccinated people. The HPV vaccine even protects against cervical cancer – a disease that can threaten fertility.

This misinformation also surrounds the COVID-19 vaccine. In reality, studies have thoroughly investigated any effects on fertility, and there have been no cases of infertility.

Extra bit of information:

Rumours about infertility can be particularly unsettling for young people. Yet, vaccinations actually protect the health of parents and their future children.

Personal vaccination check:

Are you and your children fully protected?

Vaccinations act as an invisible shield for you and your family. What's more, if you are vaccinated, you also protect those who, for various reasons, cannot be vaccinated themselves.

But do you know if your vaccinations are up to date? With this simple check, you can verify that you have all the essential vaccinations – for a carefree and healthy life.



1. Routine vaccinations – the foundation of your protection in adulthood

Tetanus, diphtheria, whooping cough (pertussis), polio:

Have you had a booster in the last 10 years?

These vaccinations protect against life-threatening infections, which are unfortunately becoming more common again due to falling vaccination rates!

Measles, mumps, rubella (MMR):

Have you been vaccinated, or have you had these diseases? Measles can cause serious complications even in adults!

TBE (tick-borne encephalitis):

Ticks are found throughout Austria, not just in the woods, but also in meadows and bushes. They can transmit the TBE virus, which can lead to meningitis.

Tip: If you're unsure, ask your general practitioner (GP) – a quick check will give you peace of mind!

Did you know?

If enough people in a community are vaccinated, diseases can no longer spread – even unvaccinated people are then better protected. This is called herd immunity. It particularly protects infants, older people and those who cannot be vaccinated. Vaccinations are not just a private matter, but also a responsibility towards our fellow human beings!



2. Vaccinations at different stages of life – protection that lasts

For parents & children:

- Has your child had all the recommended vaccinations?
- Did you know that the HPV vaccine is available from the age of 9 and protects against cancer?

For adults (aged 18–60):

- Have you had your HPV vaccine (free up to the age of 30!)?
- Have you been vaccinated against flu? (recommended annually!)

For people aged 60 and over:

- Have you received the free pneumococcal vaccination?
- Is your shingles (herpes zoster) vaccination up to date?
- Did you know that the RSV vaccination protects you against severe pneumonia and other dangerous illnesses?

„Up-to-date vaccination protection is like a seatbelt for your health – you only realise how important it is when you need it.“



Dr. Stephanie Poggenburg

1st Vice-President of the Austrian Society for General Practice and Family Medicine



3. At-risk groups – Do you need any special protection?

At-risk groups are more likely to develop severe illness – vaccinations can save lives!

You belong to an at-risk group if you:

- Have any chronic conditions (e.g. diabetes, asthma, heart problems).
- Have a weakened immune system (e.g. due to medication or conditions, such as HIV).
- Are pregnant or planning to become pregnant.
- Work in a care role or are in contact with people at risk.



4. Electronic vaccination record – always up to date!

Did you lose your paper vaccination record years ago and have no idea how long ago you had your vaccinations? Many of us are familiar with this problem! The new electronic vaccination record (e-vaccination record) makes it easy to keep track of your vaccinations.

What is the e-vaccination record?

- Digital proof of vaccination for Austria.
- Linked to your e-card – no extra registration required!
- All information is stored in the central Austrian vaccination register.

Advantages of the e-vaccination record:

- Always up to date: automatic updates after every vaccination.
- View your vaccinations in the e-vaccination record via the ELGA portal.
- Even if you are not registered with ELGA, you still have access to your e-vaccination passport

Access via:
<http://www.gesundheit.gv.at/gesundheitsleistungen/elga.html>
by using ID Austria

Prevention in everyday life

Small steps, big impact

Staying healthy is easier than you think! With these practical tips, you can boost your health and that of your family – every day.

1. Regular vaccination checks

- Check your vaccination status once a year (e.g. by using the e-vaccination record).
- Take advantage of free vaccinations (e.g. HPV up to age 30, pneumococcal from age 60).
- Do not forget your booster vaccinations (e.g. tetanus every 10 years, flu annually).

2. Hygiene – simple but effective

- Wash your hands with soap (for at least 20 seconds) – especially before eating and after coming home.
- Cough/sneeze into the crook of your arm – this protects others.
- Clean surfaces (e.g. door handles, mobile phones) – this gives viruses and bacteria no chance!

3. Boosting the immune system

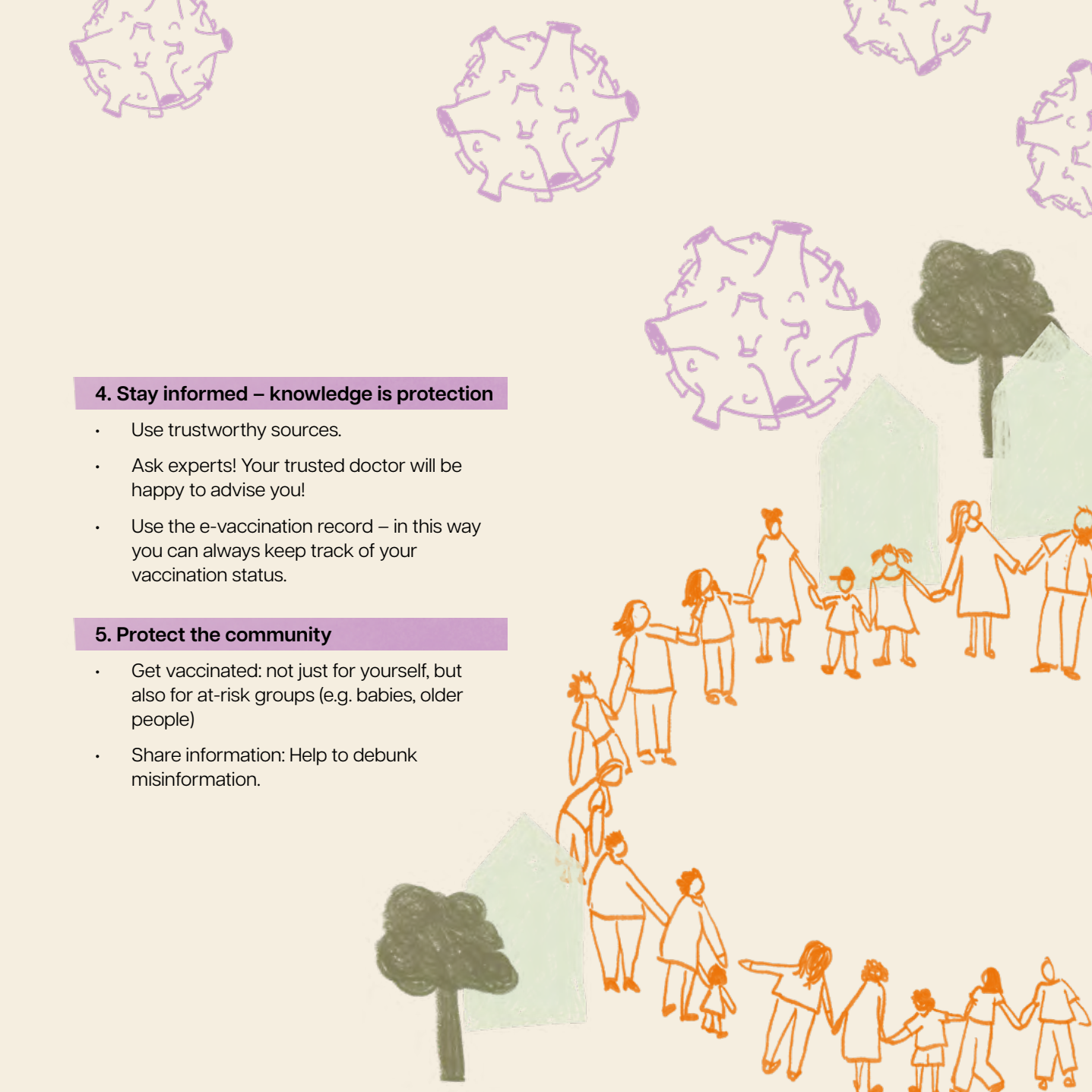
- Healthy diet: plenty of fruit, vegetables and whole-grain products
- Exercise in the fresh air – just 30 minutes a day already helps!
- Get enough sleep (7 - 8 hours) – your body regenerates and stays strong.



„Prevention is not a matter of chance, but the result of small, conscious decisions – every day.“

Dr. Susanne Rabady

2nd Vice-President of the Austrian Society for General Practice and Family Medicine



4. Stay informed – knowledge is protection

- Use trustworthy sources.
- Ask experts! Your trusted doctor will be happy to advise you!
- Use the e-vaccination record – in this way you can always keep track of your vaccination status.

5. Protect the community

- Get vaccinated: not just for yourself, but also for at-risk groups (e.g. babies, older people)
- Share information: Help to debunk misinformation.

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Services & information

Do you have any questions about vaccinations or need any help? Here you will find all the key contact details, downloads and services – simple, quick and hassle-free!

Vaccination centres near you

This is how to find your nearest vaccination centre:

Online search: www.gesundheit.gv.at/service/beratungsstellen/gesund-leben/gesundheitsvorsorge1/impfen.html

Your doctor will be pleased to advise you and administer the vaccine on site.

The brochure – available to download and take away

Available digitally:

German, English, Turkish, Serbian and more:
www.big5health.at/kampagnen/impfwoche2026/



Scan the QR code and download directly:

Help by phone:

Health hotline 1450:

Free advice on vaccinations (Mon – Fri, 8 a.m. - 8 p.m.)

Useful links & tools

Austrian vaccination schedule:

<https://www.sozialministerium.gv.at/Themen/Gesundheit/Impfen/impfplan.html>

Information on the e-vaccination record:

<https://www.gesundheit.gv.at/gesundheitsleistungen/elga/elektronischer-impfpass.html>