



P R O M I S E

Cares Health Talk

Fall 2025

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4 shots your family might need

Fall isn't just the start of the school year. It's also the best time to get vaccines (or shots) that can keep the whole family healthy this season. Here's a roundup of the shots your clan may need and when to get them.



Shot	What it does	Benefits	Who needs it	Best time to get it
Flu	Protects against the main flu viruses this season	Can keep you from getting sick. And if you do get the flu, it's usually a milder case.	• Anyone 6 months+ • People ages 65+ need a higher dose. • The nasal spray is also available for people ages 2 to 49.	By the end of October
COVID-19 updated booster	Protects against the newest COVID-19 variants	Keeps you from getting very sick or going to the hospital	• People ages 65+ • Adults and kids with chronic conditions like diabetes and asthma	With the flu shot. Getting both shots together is perfectly safe.
RSV	Protects against a common respiratory virus	Keeps babies and older adults out of the hospital	• Pregnant women during weeks 32 to 36 • Babies younger than 8 months whose mom didn't get the shot • High-risk adults ages 50 to 74 and all adults ages 75+	During RSV season (October through March)
Measles (MMR)	Protects against measles, mumps, and rubella	Can keep children from going to the hospital	• 1st dose for kids ages 12 to 15 months • 2nd dose for kids ages 4 to 6 years old	Talk to your doctor if you were never vaccinated or aren't sure. You may need 2 doses, too.

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; American Academy of Pediatrics

Holiday meals on a budget

The holidays are just around the corner. That means gathering family and friends around your table for food and good times.

Here are some tips for making holiday meals festive – without spending too much.

Think ahead. Planning the menu early will save you money. Look in your freezer or pantry to find items you already have on hand. You may be surprised to find several that fit into your meal plan.

Next, make a list of what you need to buy. Then find coupons online or sales at the grocery store for those foods.

Be flexible about the meat dish. Certain cuts of meat can be less expensive. For instance, a whole turkey is cheaper than a turkey breast. And you'll also have leftovers to use later. Or you might consider serving lean pork loin instead of beef.

Share the load. Ask guests to bring their favorite sides or desserts while you provide the main dish and even the appetizers. This will save everyone time and money.

Serve less food. Maybe this is the year to trim the extras. Instead of serving several



desserts, choose one special treat. Or splurge on the main dish but plan on fewer sides.

Cut down on sugary drinks by serving water before and during the meal. It can be sparkling or still. Water is cheaper and healthier than soda.

Check out community resources. If money is tight, a food pantry can be a budget-saving option. Food banks have a variety of foods for your holidays, including fresh produce. See the box below for how to find one near you, or visit calfresh.dss.ca.gov/food.

Sources: U.S. Department of Agriculture; University of Minnesota Extension

Food pantry services

For a list of food programs and/or to find a food distribution site near you, please visit sandiegofoodbank.org or call (866) 350-FOOD (3663). For a free list of community resources, including help with food and other social services, please visit 211sandiego.org or call 211.

Why doulas offer great support during pregnancy

Pregnancy can be exciting. But along with the happiness may come some challenges.

For instance, you know it’s important to eat healthy foods to help your baby grow. Yet it can be tough when your local store doesn’t carry much fresh produce.

Support from family and friends can help. But pregnant parents can also use extra TLC. That’s where doulas come in.

Doulas are birth workers who support you in many ways throughout pregnancy, childbirth, and after giving birth. They’re not medical providers. But they can be your advocate.

In fact, using a doula can help parents have a better experience during pregnancy and labor. Here are some benefits to having one:

They can go with you to checkups. During doctor visits, a doula can take notes for you. If you need help getting your questions answered, they can do that, too.

They tell you about community resources. Your doula can help you find services like food pantries. Or places that offer free or low-cost diapers and formula.

They help create a birth plan. A birth plan is a guide for doctors and nurses. Your doula can help you write down your wishes for labor, including what pain medications you want.



They cheer you on during labor. Your doula can make sure the hospital staff knows your birth plan. They help you deal with pain, too.

They give breastfeeding advice. A doula can lend a hand as you start breastfeeding. They can also refer you to the Maternity Program for support and care.

They help you with the baby. Your doula can offer tips on caring for your newborn and share ways for you to recover more quickly.

To request a doula or learn more, go to blueshieldca.com/doula/medi-cal or call (888) 802-4410 (TTY: 711), 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Health equity

Health equity means everyone has a fair and just opportunity to attain their best health. The Blue Shield Promise Health Equity Office is responsible for eliminating disparities or differences between groups. Visit blueshieldca.com/health-equity to learn more.

Common breastfeeding challenges, solved

Breastfeeding has many benefits. It’s a nice way to bond with your newborn. And it can protect babies and moms from certain illnesses. But getting started isn’t always easy. Talk to your doctor if you’re having trouble. And it’s OK if you need to bottle feed. Formula is also an excellent source of nutrition.

If you can’t afford formula, you may qualify for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). Call (800) 852-5770 (TTY: 711), 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday to learn more.

In the meantime, try these tips for help with these four nursing challenges.

The challenge	The solution
You can’t get a “good” latch. Newborns need to suck on your entire nipple. And that may take some time to learn.	Tickle your baby’s lips with your nipple. When your baby opens wide, bring them to your breast. Aim your nipple at the roof of their mouth. One way to check? Your baby’s lips look like a fish’s mouth.
Your nipples are sore. Your nipples could be too dry or too moist. Or your baby may not be latching on to your breast correctly.	Wear a bra made from natural fabric, like cotton. And apply olive oil or lanolin to your nipples.
You don’t know if your baby is getting enough milk. It can be hard to tell. After all, there’s no way to measure how much milk your newborn is actually taking in.	Look for these signs: Your baby is happy in between feedings. They have at least six wet diapers a day. You can hear or see them swallow as they nurse.
You’re so, so tired. Feeding and caring for a tiny baby is hard work – and exhausting.	Let friends and family help with chores or baby care. Drink plenty of water. Don’t forget to eat meals and snacks. And be sure to rest.

Need help nursing?

Contact our Maternity Program for a free breast pump, support, or both. Visit blueshieldca.com/maternity-program, or call (888) 802-4410 (TTY: 711), 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

6 super-quick stress relievers



Feeling overwhelmed? You're not the only one. Last year, 43% of adults in the U.S. reported feeling more anxious than they did the previous year.

Stress can be bad for your health. But there's help. First, try Wellvolution®, a digital platform with a program to reduce stress that comes with your plan at no cost. (Visit wellvolution.com/medi-cal for more info.) Then try these ways to lower tension.

1 Breathe deeply

Put one hand on your belly. Breathe in as your belly rises. Hold for a count of three. Breathe out. Then hold for another count of three. Do this for one minute.

2 Relax your muscles

Stress causes your muscles to tighten up. To relax, drop your shoulders and let your arms hang down. Then loosen your hands and fingers. Root your feet on the floor.

3 Say something positive to yourself

Silence worries by repeating some calming words. Find a quiet spot and close your eyes. Say, "I'm OK," or "I can handle this."

4 Play a soothing tune

Listening to music you love can help you unwind. The key: Really pay attention to it.

5 Watch a funny video

Laughing can raise the feel-good chemicals in your brain and lower stress hormones.

6 Count backwards

Count down from 10 to one. It's hard to worry when your mind is busy with a task. For extra relief, breathe deeply as you count.

If stress is affecting your mental health, call **(855) 321-2211 (TTY: 711)**, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Friday. Or visit blueshieldca.com/behavioralhealth/medi-cal.

Sources: Harvard Health; Mayo Clinic

We're here to help

Our Customer Service team can answer questions and connect you to care and resources. We can help you:

- Arrange a ride to medical appointments
- Get prior authorization for care
- Understand if you're eligible for a Medicare and Medi-Cal plan together
- Find a doctor, scheduling, and more

Call Customer Service at **(855) 699-5557 (TTY: 711)**, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Ask a doctor

Expert advice from Blue Shield of California Promise Health Plan's chief medical officer

Q I've just been diagnosed with type 2 diabetes. What should I do?

A When you have type 2 diabetes, your blood sugar levels are too high. High blood sugar can damage your body, including your eyes, especially when it's not treated.

That can be scary. But treating diabetes is easier now. The key is to partner with your doctor, who may suggest these steps:

Check your mealtime routine. To control blood sugar, you need to eat every four hours to even out the calories you take in during the day. So look at your eating schedule and make changes as needed.

Include your family. It helps to have your family's support. Read labels together. Learn about foods to avoid, like sugary cereals.

Protect your health. You need regular visits to your doctor, eye exams, and A1c tests to make sure blood sugar levels don't cause damage. Your doctor will help you get these tests scheduled. Diabetes can affect how often you get sick, too. So stay up to date on shots.

You'll probably take medications. There are oral medications and ones that you inject



to keep blood sugar stable. Your doctor will work with you to choose the right kind.

It may sound like a lot to handle at first. But soon you'll have a treatment plan that is right for you. And still do the things you love.

Renewing Medi-Cal

Your Medi-Cal coverage will be automatically renewed yearly if you can be verified electronically. If not, you'll get a renewal package in the mail. If your contact information has changed, call **(855) 636-5251 (TTY: 711)**, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding holidays.

Health education programs

Take classes at no extra cost that help you eat healthier, be active, and more. You can also get benefits notices and health brochures in your preferred language or in alternative formats. To learn more, call Customer Service at **(855) 699-5557 (TTY: 711)**, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Friday. Or go to blueshieldca.com/healtheducationlibrary.

Do you need interpreting services?

We offer free interpreting services, including ASL, to our members over the phone and in person. Phone interpreter services are available 24/7. To ensure the availability of an in-person interpreter, please call our Customer Service department at least five days in advance to schedule an interpreter for your doctor's appointment. Do not assume your provider will schedule an interpreter for you. They help you talk with a provider who does not speak your language. Some benefits of an interpreter:

- Trained in medical terms
- Helps you understand all information and explains your diagnosis and treatment in your language

We discourage using family or friends, especially minors, to interpret. You may get wrong information, risking your care.



Call Customer Service at **(855) 699-5557 (TTY: 711)**, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Friday:

- **To request an interpreter:** Requests can be made within the current month; you can make your request at any time during that month. For appointments scheduled in the future, you will need to call back during that specific month to submit your request.
- If you have an **authorized representative and/or need communication** in an alternative format like braille or large font
- If you want to **file a grievance** because we did not meet your language needs

Community resource directory

We offer members a listing of community resources and agencies. It has information about agencies that can help you with issues like domestic violence or elder care. If you would like a copy, call Customer Service at **(855) 699-5557 (TTY: 711)**, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Friday.

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You can get this document for free in other formats, such as large print, braille, or audio. Call (855) 699-5557 (TTY: 711), 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Friday. The call is free.

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