

Adolescent Immunization Questions & Answers

Are there vaccines that protect against communicable diseases?

Yes! Immunizations against tetanus (lockjaw)-diphtheria-pertussis (whooping cough), meningococcus (a cause of meningitis and other serious infections), hepatitis B, measles-mumps-rubella (German measles), varicella (chickenpox), and human papilloma virus (HPV) are recommended for all adolescents who have not already received them. In addition, vaccinations against hepatitis A, influenza (flu) and pneumococcal disease are needed by some adolescents.

Should all adolescents be immunized?

This depends on which vaccines they have received as children. All adolescents should receive a tetanus diphtheria pertussis (Tdap) booster and the meningococcal conjugate vaccine. Hepatitis B vaccine and measles, mumps, rubella (German measles) vaccine is indicated for all adolescents aged 8-18 who have not been vaccinated previously. In addition, they may require immunization against diphtheria if they haven't received it as children. Varicella (chickenpox) vaccine is recommended for those not previously vaccinated and who have no reliable history of the disease. Girls and women aged 11-26 years should receive the HPV vaccine to prevent cervical cancer. All adolescents with diabetes or chronic heart, lung, liver or kidney disorders need protection against influenza and pneumococcal disease, and should consult their healthcare providers regarding their need for these vaccines. Influenza vaccination is also recommended for pregnant women, persons <18 years of age on chronic aspirin therapy and those that have any condition (e.g., cognitive dysfunction, spinal cord injuries, seizure disorders, or other neuromuscular disorders) that can compromise respiratory function or the handling of respiratory secretions or that can increase the risk for aspiration; In addition, adolescents who live with or care for high risk persons such as those <5 years or >64 years old or persons of any age with certain chronic conditions, should also be vaccinated yearly. Hepatitis A vaccine is recommended for adolescents traveling to or working in countries where the disease is common, living in communities with outbreaks of the disease, and living in states that have hepatitis A rates that exceed the national average. It is also recommended for adolescents who have chronic liver disease or clotting-factor disorders, are injection drug users, or are male and have sex with other males.

How often do I need to be immunized?

The first and only dose of meningococcal conjugate vaccine is recommended for adolescents at age 11-12 and before high school entry if they did not receive the vaccine at age 11-12. Immunization against tetanus and diphtheria, and pertussis (Tdap vaccine) should be supplemented with one booster of Tdap at 11-12 years of age. Those who deferred Td boosters during 2001 and early 2002 because of vaccine shortages or have not received the Td booster for any other reason should receive Tdap to get back on track. Adolescents not previously vaccinated should receive three doses of hepatitis B vaccine and 1 or 2 MMR, depending on how many they have previously received. One dose of chickenpox vaccine is recommended for adolescents 11-12 years of age, or 2 doses for those 13 or older, if there is no proof of prior chickenpox disease or immunization. Girls and women aged 11-26 should receive 3 doses of the HPV vaccine. Influenza vaccine should be administered yearly to adolescents who have any medical condition that places them at high risk for complications associated with influenza, such as diabetes, asthma, or chronic heart, lung or other diseases or who live with or care for high risk persons, including persons <5 year of age or >64 years of age. A single dose of pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine is recommended for adolescents with certain chronic diseases who are at increased risk for this disease or its complications. Hepatitis A vaccine is administered in 2 doses.

Are there side effects to these immunizations?

Vaccines are among the safest medical products available. Some common side effects are a sore arm or low grade fever. As with any medicine, there are very small risks that serious problems could occur after getting a vaccine. However, the potential risks associated with the diseases that these vaccines prevent are much greater than the potential risks associated with the vaccines themselves.

Should I have a personal immunization record?

Yes! This record will help you and your health care provider ensure that you are protected against vaccine-preventable diseases. Ask your provider for this record, and be sure to take it with you every time you visit your provider so that it can be reviewed and updated.

Facts About Adolescent Immunization

- FACT:** Vaccines are among the safest medical products available.
- FACT:** Approximately 6.8 million children and adolescents aged 2 to 18 years have chronic illnesses, placing them at risk for influenza and pneumococcal diseases and their complications.
- FACT:** More than 44.6 million children and adolescents aged 2 to 18 years have an indication for influenza vaccination, including either their age, medical condition, or because they live with a high risk person..
- FACT:** Although no longer a very common disease in the U.S., diphtheria remains a large problem in other countries and can pose a serious threat to those in the U.S. who may not be fully immunized and who travel to other countries or have contact with immigrants or international travelers coming to the U.S.
- FACT:** Forty to fifty cases of tetanus (lockjaw) occur each year, resulting in approximately five deaths annually in the U.S.
- FACT:** The majority of the estimated 60,000 new hepatitis B infections each year strike adolescents and young adults. The hepatitis B virus is 100 times more infectious than HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.
- FACT:** The hepatitis B vaccine is recognized as the first anti-cancer vaccine because it can prevent primary liver cancer caused by hepatitis B infection.
- FACT:** High rates of hepatitis A infection occur among children and adolescents 5 to 14 years old who live in some parts of the United States, and most cases can be attributed to person-to-person transmission.
- FACT:** Of the 66 confirmed cases of measles reported in 2005, approximately 65% occurred in people younger than 20 years of age.
- FACT:** About one-fifth of people infected with the mumps virus do not have any symptoms.
- FACT:** By age 50, 80% of women will be infected with human papilloma virus (HPV), the virus that causes cervical cancer. There are on average 9,710 new cases and 3,700 deaths from cervical cancer in the United States every year.