

Adolescent Immunization Questions & Answers

Are there vaccines that protect against communicable diseases?

Yes! Vaccines are available to protect against tetanus (lockjaw)-diphtheria-pertussis (whooping cough), meningococcus, influenza (flu), hepatitis B, measles-mumps- rubella (German measles), varicella (chickenpox), and human papilloma virus (HPV) are recommended for all unimmunized or incompletely immunized adolescents. In addition, vaccines against hepatitis A and pneumococcal disease are available and recommended for use by some adolescents in special circumstances.

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, the meningococcal conjugate vaccine, and an annual seasonal influenza vaccine. Girls and women aged 11-26 years should receive the HPV vaccine to prevent cervical cancer and genital warts. Hepatitis B vaccine and measles, mumps, rubella (German measles) vaccine is indicated for all adolescents who have not been vaccinated previously. Varicella (chickenpox) vaccine is recommended for those not previously vaccinated and do not have proof of immunity such as history of having had the disease. All adolescents with diabetes or chronic heart, lung, liver or kidney disorders need protection against pneumococcal disease and should consult their healthcare providers regarding their need for these vaccines. 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 rates that exceed the national average, and for any person wishing to obtain immunity. 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?

Meningococcal conjugate vaccine is routinely recommended for adolescents aged 11-18 years and for certain high-risk children from 2 through 10 years of age. A single booster dose of Tdap is recommended at ages 11-12 years to maintain immunity against tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis. Females aged 11-26 should receive 3 doses of the HPV vaccine. Adolescents not previously vaccinated against hepatitis B should receive three doses of hepatitis B vaccine. Depending on how many doses they have previously received, one or 2 doses of the MMR vaccine is required for protection against measles, mumps and rubella. Two doses of chickenpox vaccine are recommended for adolescents 11-12 years of age if there is no proof of immunity such as history of having had chickenpox or immunization. Adolescents who received one dose of varicella vaccine during childhood are recommended to receive a second dose. Seasonal influenza vaccine should be administered yearly to adolescents. A single dose of pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine is recommended for adolescents with certain underlying medical conditions and who are at increased risk for this disease or its complications. For adolescents recommended to receive Hepatitis A vaccine, the 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 medical product, there are very small risks that serious problems could occur after getting a vaccine. However, the potential benefits associated with the diseases that these vaccines prevent are much greater than the potential risks associated with the vaccines themselves. Report any adverse events following immunization to your parent or guardian who will contact your provider or send a report to the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS) through their VAERS website at www.vaers.hhs.gov or to receive a form to complete by mail call 1-800-822-7967.

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:** Although no longer a very common disease in the U.S., diphtheria remains a 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 with diphtheria or have contact with immigrants or international travelers coming to the U.S. from countries with diphtheria.
- 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 43,000 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:** In 2007, rates of hepatitis A infection among children and adolescents 5 to 14 years old who live in some parts of the United States were dramatically reduced by vaccination.
- FACT:** Of the 140 confirmed cases of measles reported in 2008, approximately 75% occurred in people younger than 20 years of age.
- FACT:** In 2006, an outbreak of mumps occurred in the United States and affected over 6000 people. The highest incidence occurred among college-aged persons, but younger adolescents were also affected.
- FACT:** At least 50% of sexually active 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.
- FACT:** About 25-30% of reported pertussis cases are in adolescents.