

Immunizations: They're Not Just for Kids

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While parents generally are careful to keep their children up-to-date on immunizations, many are not as meticulous about getting themselves vaccinated—or of keeping track of which vaccines they've had. If a flu shot is the only vaccine you've had in recent memory, it's quite possible that you are missing some critical immunizations.

Whether or not you are sure you received all your childhood vaccinations, you'll want to ask your primary care provider to check your records, as you may be due for a booster. If no record exists, your provider can advise you about which shots you need. Vaccines such as those for Tetanus and diphtheria must be repeated ("boosted") every 10 years. In addition, some newer vaccines, such as Human Papillomavirus (HPV), shingles, pneumococcal and flu vaccines, are advised for certain adults depending on their age, medical profile and exposure to the general public.

Whooping cough (pertussis) and diphtheria may sound like afflictions from the Dark Ages, but they still exist. In fact, according to the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases, more than 50,000 adults in the United States die from vaccine-preventable infections each year. That's more than die from HIV/AIDS, breast cancer or traffic accidents. Unfortunately, there has been an increase in some of these vaccine-preventable diseases recently. For example, the number of whooping cough cases in Washington has been increasing in the last two years.

Along with eating right and getting exercise, staying up-to-date on your vaccinations is a key component for protecting your overall health. Vaccines protect you—as well as the coworkers and family members you come in contact with—from life-threatening diseases and infections.

Here is a list of the immunizations most commonly recommended for adults. If you travel outside North America, especially to tropical locations, you may need others as well.

- Flu vaccine every year. This is especially important for those who have contact with the very young or very old. The vaccine can be done as a shot or, for those between the ages of 2 and 49, a nasal mist.
- Tetanus-diphtheria (Td) booster every 10 years. A tetanus-diphtheria-pertussis (Tdap) is recommended once for those between ages 11 and 64.
- Shingles (Zoster) vaccine once at age 60 or above.
- Pneumococcal (Pneumovax) vaccine once at age 65 or above (or earlier if recommended by your provider).



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