

## **Adult Immunization Questions & Answers**

### **Are there vaccines that protect against communicable diseases for adults?**

Yes! Immunizations are readily available for such common adult illnesses as influenza (flu), pneumococcal disease and hepatitis B. Vaccinations against measles, mumps, rubella (German measles), hepatitis A, tetanus (lockjaw), diphtheria and varicella (chickenpox) are also needed by some adults. U.S. Public Health Service recommendations clearly identify people who are at risk for these diseases and who should be immunized to prevent these diseases and their complications. Consult your healthcare provider or local health department regarding your own immunization status and recommendations for immunizations.

### **Why immunize?**

Some of these illnesses, once contracted, do not have a cure, and all may cause tremendous health problems or even death. Vaccines are some of the safest medicines available, are very effective, and can relieve suffering costs related to these preventable diseases for us all.

### **Should all adults be immunized?**

Yes. All adults require tetanus and diphtheria (Td) immunizations at 10 year intervals throughout the life. Adults who deferred Td boosters during 2001 and early 2002 because of vaccine shortages should get back on track as the supply problems have been resolved. Adults born after 1956 need to be immunized against measles, mumps and rubella. All adults aged 65 or older, as well as persons aged 2-64 years who have diabetes or chronic heart, lung, liver or kidney disorders need protection against pneumococcal disease, and should consult their healthcare providers regarding their need for this shot. Influenza vaccination is recommended for adults 50 years of age or older, pregnant women and residents of long-term care facilities, as well as for persons older than 6 months of age who have chronic illness and persons 6 months-18 years of age who receive chronic aspirin therapy. High-risk individuals such as these should be immunized before non-high risk individuals under the age of 65. Hepatitis B vaccine is recommended for adults in certain high-risk groups, such as healthcare workers and persons with multiple sex partners. Hepatitis B vaccine is also recommended for all adolescents who may not have not received it during infancy or childhood. Hepatitis A vaccine is recommended for all susceptible travelers to, for persons working in, countries with intermediate or high rates of hepatitis A virus (HAV) infection, and for those residing in states where the hepatitis A rate exceeds the national average. Many adults, including teachers of young children and day care workers, residents and staff in institutional settings, military personnel, nonpregnant women of childbearing age, international travelers, healthcare workers and family members of immunocompromised persons, who have not had chickenpox and have not been immunized previously against chickenpox should receive varicella vaccine.

## **Where can I obtain my immunizations?**

Immunizations should be available from family doctors and internists. Additionally, your city or county health department or local hospital may hold clinics to administer these vaccines, and many pharmacies offer vaccinations as well.

## **How often do I need to be immunized?**

Immunizations for pneumococcal disease (except for patients at particular risk for pneumococcal complications), measles, mumps and rubella are usually administered once, and offer protection for life. Some persons born after 1956 may require a second measles vaccination. Influenza vaccine must be administered yearly due to the appearance of new strains of virus which are not addressed by previous vaccines. Additional booster doses of tetanus and diphtheria vaccines (usually given as a combination Td vaccine) are required every 10 years to maintain immunity against these diseases. Hepatitis B vaccine is administered in 3 doses given over a 6-month period. Two doses of chickenpox vaccine are recommended for people 13 years or older who have not had the disease. Two doses of hepatitis A are needed 6 to 12 months apart to ensure long-term protection.

## **What do these shots cost?**

The cost may vary depending on insurance coverage. Check with your healthcare provider or clinic, and your health insurance for exact rates. Remember, both influenza and pneumococcal vaccinations are fully paid for by Medicare Part B if your healthcare provider accepts the Medicare-approved payment amount. Medicare Part B also will pay up to 80% of the costs of hepatitis B vaccinations for qualifying individuals.

## **Are there side effects to these immunizations?**

Vaccines are among the safest medicines available. Some common side effects are a sore arm or low 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 these vaccines prevent are much greater than the potential risks associated with the vaccines themselves.

## **What shots do I need if I'm traveling abroad?**

Contact your healthcare provider or the public health department as early as possible to check on the immunizations you may need. Vaccines against certain diseases such as hepatitis A, yellow fever and typhoid fever are recommended for different countries. The time required to receive all immunizations will depend on whether you need one dose or a vaccine series. There are several books available which provide information on specific vaccines required by different countries and general health measures for travelers. You may also call the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) information line for international travelers toll-free at (877) 394-8747 or visit the CDC Travel Web site at <http://www.cdc.gov/travel>.

## **Should I carry a personal immunization record?**

Definitely yes! A permanent immunization record should be kept by every adult. It will help you and your healthcare provider ensure that you are fully protected against vaccine-preventable diseases. It can also prevent needless revaccination during a health emergency or when you change providers. Ask your provider for an immunization record, and be sure to take it with you to every time you visit so it can be reviewed by your provider and updated each time you are immunized.

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