

ARE YOU READY?



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Staying healthy, preventing disease: Vaccines for adults

There are many things we grow out of as we move into adulthood, but vaccines aren't one of them. As we grow up and get older, vaccines remain one of the best things we can do to stay healthy and strong.

Why vaccinate?

While it's true that the U.S. has been successful at reducing the threat of many infectious diseases, outbreaks and infections can still happen. Not only will getting vaccinated protect you, it will protect those you care about, especially very young children and seniors. Plus, it's important to be a role model. Getting vaccinated is a healthy behavior that's good to pass down through the generations.

In the United States, most children receive their vaccinations, but the same does not hold true for adults. Millions of American adults skip recommended vaccinations, which leads to tens of thousands of preventable deaths and illnesses. In fact, about 50,000 U.S. adults die every year from vaccine-preventable diseases such as the flu, hepatitis B and pneumococcal disease, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Talk to your health care provider to find out what vaccines you should receive and when.



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Adult vaccines

As an adult, the type of vaccines you should get can depend on your age, lifestyle, profession, underlying health conditions and the places you travel. You may also need a booster shot, which is an additional vaccine needed to maintain your immunity to a disease. For example, adults need a tetanus booster shot every 10 years.

Some vaccines are needed to not only protect you, but also those around you. For example, it's recommended that adults be immunized against pertussis, commonly known as whooping cough. While pertussis in adults can seem like little more than a bad cold, it can be very dangerous if passed along to an infant who is not fully immunized against the illness.

Some other adult vaccines you should know about are:

- **Flu vaccine:** Adults should receive a flu shot each year to protect themselves and those around them from the flu, which can be especially risky for adults ages 65 and older, pregnant women and people already living with serious health conditions.
- **Shingles vaccine:** The shingles vaccine is recommended for people ages 60 years old and older. Shingles, which can be very painful, is an outbreak of rash or blisters on the skin and is caused by the chickenpox virus.
- **Tdap vaccine:** The Tdap vaccine protects against tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis. If you are around infants, it's especially important to receive this vaccine.
- **Pneumococcal vaccine:** Pneumococcal disease can cause three major conditions – pneumonia, bacteremia and meningitis – and is a leading cause of serious illness among children and adults worldwide. It's an important vaccine for at-risk older adults.
- **HPV vaccine:** The HPV vaccine protects against strains of the human papillomavirus that can cause cervical and anal cancer.



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Assistance is available



Photo courtesy iStockphoto—Catherine Lane

For adults without health insurance, there are often programs that can help you get immunized. Call your local health department or pharmacy and ask about vaccine assistance programs or free vaccine clinics.



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