

Chronic Disease Prevention Bulletin

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August is National Immunization Awareness Month

The National Partnership for Immunization (NPI) has designated August as National Immunization Awareness Month to remind adults, parents, caregivers, healthcare providers and others that immunization improves the health and quality of life for persons of all ages in the United States.



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August is an appropriate time for such reminders because parents are preparing for the start of school, students are leaving for college and the flu season is rapidly approaching. By staying up-to-date on the recommended vaccines, individuals can protect themselves, their families and friends and their communities from serious life-threatening infections.

Who Should Be Immunized?

Getting immunized is a lifelong, life-protecting community effort regardless of age, sex, race, ethnic background or country of origin. Recommended vaccinations begin soon after birth and continue throughout life. Being aware of the vaccines that are recommended for infants, children, adolescents, adults and seniors, and making sure that we receive these immunizations, are critical to protecting ourselves and our communities from disease.

Why Immunize Adults?

If you're a healthy adult, you may not spend much time thinking about immunization. Getting the recommended adult immunizations is one of the most effective ways to stay healthy. In fact, vaccines help prevent diseases that affect millions of adults every year—diseases that can lead to hospitalization or even death.

Influenza vaccine

Recommended for adults 50 years or older and for younger adults, including pregnant women; residents of long-term care facilities; those who have chronic heart, lung, liver or kidney disease, asthma or diabetes; healthcare workers; and household contacts of people at risk for influenza-related complications.

Fact: *Each year in the US, there are an average of 114,000 hospitalizations and approximately 36,000 influenza-related deaths.*

Measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine

At least one dose of MMR vaccine is recommended for all adults born after 1956 who have no medical history of receiving the vaccine or of actually having the disease. Two doses are recommended for healthcare workers, travelers to countries where measles is common, and adults entering colleges and technical schools.

Fact: *Rubella (German measles) is of particular concern during pregnancy as it can result in severe birth defects, miscarriages and still births.*

Meningococcal vaccine

Required or recommended by many colleges for incoming students, particularly those living in dormitories.

Fact: *Meningococcal disease affects the brain and spinal cord and can cause high fever, headache and stiff neck; about 10% of cases are fatal.*

Pneumococcal vaccine

Recommended for all adults 65 or older as well as people 19-64 years old with diabetes or chronic heart, lung, liver or kidney disease. Also recommended for residents of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities.

Fact: *Pneumococcal disease causes 175,000 hospitalizations and thousands of deaths each year in the United States.*

Tetanus-diphtheria (Td) vaccine

Recommended as a booster every 10 years after an initial series of shots.

Fact: *Almost all reported cases of tetanus (lockjaw) occur in people who have never been vaccinated or those who have completed a primary series of shots but have not had a booster vaccination in the past 10 years. Diphtheria can lead to severe breathing problems, heart failure, paralysis, and sometimes death.*

Chickenpox (varicella) vaccine

Recommended for teachers of young children, daycare workers, residents and staff of institutional settings, non-pregnant women of childbearing age, students living in dormitories, military personnel, healthcare workers and household contacts of immune compromised persons or of young children if they are unvaccinated or have never had the disease.

Fact: *Adults are more likely than children to develop severe complications when infected with chickenpox virus.*

Hepatitis A vaccine

Recommended for adults who have chronic liver disease or clotting-factor disorders, use illegal injecting or non-injecting drugs, travel to developing countries where hepatitis A is common, work in research labs or with infected animals.

Fact: *Hepatitis A virus infected an estimated 93,000 people in the US in 2002.*

Hepatitis B vaccine

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Recommended for adults with certain medical or exposure risks, such as healthcare workers, people with multiple sex partners or who have recently acquired a sexually transmitted disease, users of illegal injecting and non-injecting drugs and household members and sexual partners of hepatitis B carriers.

Fact: *The hepatitis B virus is 100 times more infectious than HIV. This disease can cause long-term liver damage and cancer.*

Are Vaccines Safe?

Vaccines are among the safest medicines available. Some common side effects are soreness at the site of injection or low fever. As with any medicine, there is a small risk that adverse events 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.

Need More Information?

For more information about vaccines and vaccine recommendations, ask your health care provider or call the CDC National Immunization Hotline at (800) 232-2522 (English) or (800) 232-0233 (Spanish).

Sources:

www.partnersforimmunization.org
www.cdc.gov/nip



The Live Healthy Georgia campaign was launched in March 2004 by the Georgia Department of Human Resources in partnership with Governor Sonny Perdue. The campaign promotes five key messages to improve the health of Georgians: Be Active, Eat Healthy, Be Smokefree, Get Checked, and Be Positive.

Visit <http://health.state.ga.us/healthtopics/lhg.asp>
for more information.