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Staying healthy, preventing disease: Vaccines for teens

Babies aren't the only ones susceptible to vaccine-preventable illnesses; teens are too. As kids enter their pre-teen and teenage years, a handful of vaccines are recommended to keep them healthy and resilient.

Why vaccinate?

While it's true that the United States has been successful at reducing the threat of many infectious diseases, outbreaks and infections can still happen. Keeping up with the recommended vaccine schedule for teens is not only good for their health, but the health of their family, friends and community.

The pre-teen and teen years are also a time for kids to receive booster shots – an additional vaccine needed to maintain immunity to a disease – or to catch up on vaccines that might have been missed in childhood. Talk to your health care provider today about the kinds of vaccines recommended for your pre-teens and teenagers.



Photo courtesy iStockphoto—Silvia Boratti

Teen vaccines

Health officials recommend pre-teens and teenagers receive at least four vaccines.

- **Tdap vaccine:** The “Tdap” vaccine protects against tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis, which is also known as whooping cough. All three of these diseases can cause serious health complications. While infants and toddlers are also vaccinated against these diseases, the immunity begins to wear off as kids get older. So pre-teens are recommended to get a booster shot.

■ **Meningococcal conjugate vaccine:** Also known as the MCV4 vaccine, meningococcal conjugate vaccine provides protection against meningococcal disease, a leading cause of bacterial meningitis in children. Meningococcal disease is extremely serious, with about one of every 10 people who get the disease dying from it. Those who survive the disease can be left with lifelong health problems and disabilities. The vaccine is especially important as kids leave for college, as the disease is spread via sneezing, coughing and kissing.

■ **HPV vaccine:** The HPV vaccine protects young girls and women against strains of the human papillomavirus that can cause cervical cancer. Young boys of the same age can also receive the vaccine to protect them against the strains of human papillomavirus that cause anal cancer and genital warts. Remember: It is very important to receive the full series of shots to become fully immunized.

■ **Flu shot:** The annual flu vaccine protects teens against flu strains predicted to be most common in an upcoming flu season. Most people who catch the flu will recover. However, the illness can cause complications in teens who already have underlying health conditions. Getting vaccinated will also prevent teens from passing the illness along to younger or older family members, among whom the flu can be a more dangerous threat. Teens should get vaccinated against flu in the fall or as soon as flu vaccine is available in your community.



Teen vaccines

Teen vaccinations are also a time to talk to your doctor about whether your teen is up to date on all of her or his childhood vaccinations. If not, this may be a time to play catch up.



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