

ADULT VACCINATION: DID YOU KNOW THAT THERE ARE MANY ADULTS IN CANADA WHO ARE AT RISK OF DISEASES THAT ARE PREVENTABLE WITH VACCINES?

Those who have not kept their vaccine status current may contract serious (or even fatal) illnesses. All adults should receive routine immunizations against vaccine-preventable diseases that are appropriate for their age and risk status. Fully immunized adults can help prevent the spread of serious diseases to other vulnerable Canadians who cannot be immunized.



THE IMPORTANCE OF ROUTINE IMMUNIZATIONS

It remains the responsibility of us all, as health care providers, to educate adults in our care about the importance of routine immunizations, and ensure that their immunization status remains current. As health care providers working in a long-term care or retirement setting, it is our responsibility to ensure that the care team is aware of the vaccination needs of our residents. Since some adults may not have had all of their required vaccinations in childhood (either due to different vaccine schedules or due to growing up in countries other than Canada), it is a good idea to review their entire vaccine history upon admission or readmission to your facilities. As health care providers we can ask our residents or gather the information from their families to ensure that we record and update their vaccination status and so protect them from illnesses that are vaccine preventable.

INFORMATION ABOUT A FEW KEY VACCINES

SHINGLES

SHINGLES IS CAUSED BY THE VARICELLA-ZOSTER VIRUS, THE SAME VIRUS THAT CAUSES CHICKENPOX.

If an adult has had chickenpox before (typically during childhood), the virus can reactivate and cause a painful skin rash which is known as shingles. The vaccine to prevent shingles is the herpes zoster vaccine (Zostavax); it reduces the risk of shingles by 50%. Approximately 20% of those who have shingles will experience painful neuropathy due to nerve damage, which can impact a resident's quality of life. Unfortunately the incidence and severity of shingles increases with age. In addition, shingles can recur, and with each subsequent shingle episode, the risk of painful neuropathy increases. It is recommended for those over 60 years of age, however anyone over 50 years can get it.



THE FOLLOWING VACCINES ARE IMPORTANT FOR ADULTS

1. *Shingles vaccine (in those 60 years of age and older)*
2. *Pneumococcal vaccine (in those 65 years of age or older)*
3. *Influenza vaccine (annually)*
4. *Pertussis vaccine (a booster should be given once in adulthood)*
5. *Tetanus and diphtheria vaccine (a booster is recommended every 10 years once in adulthood)*

PNEUMOCOCCAL DISEASE

THE PNEUMOCOCCAL VACCINE PREVENTS INVASIVE PNEUMOCOCCAL DISEASE THAT CAN CAUSE PNEUMONIA, BACTEREMIA, AND MENINGITIS.

Pneumococcal vaccines are recommended for those over the age of 50 (if high risk) and in those over the age of 65. There are two types of pneumococcal vaccine (Pneumovax-23 and Prevnar), and depending on your medical history and your age, it is recommended to be vaccinated with one or both during your lifetime.

INFLUENZA (the flu)

APPROXIMATELY 10-20% OF THE CANADIAN POPULATION GET INFLUENZA EACH YEAR.

There are approximately 5,000 deaths per year attributed to influenza or its complications. 90% of the deaths are in those over 65. Getting the influenza vaccine (flu shot) is the best way to prevent or reduce complications of the influenza virus. Adults at the greatest risk of influenza-related complications include residents of care facilities, people 65 years of age and older, pregnant women, children, Aboriginal peoples, and those with chronic disease such as COPD, diabetes and heart failure. We should all vaccinate ourselves to prevent the spread of influenza in our care facilities.



PERTUSSIS

PERTUSSIS, OR WHOOPING COUGH, IS A SERIOUS INFECTION OF THE AIRWAYS THAT CAN LEAD TO PNEUMONIA, SEIZURES, AND SOMETIMES DEATH.

It can affect individuals of any age and immunity to pertussis from vaccination and natural disease wears off with time. Adults who are unvaccinated or have not received a booster vaccination as an adult are at risk of infection and its consequent transmission to others. The combination vaccine, Tdap, can be used for those adults over 65 who are unsure of their vaccination status and in some provinces it is covered even for those who were vaccinated in adolescence. Tdap covers tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis.

TETANUS

TETANUS, ALSO CALLED LOCKJAW, IS CAUSED BY *CLOSTRIDIUM TETANI*, WHICH CAN BE FOUND IN DIRT, DUST AND SOIL.

Bacteria enter the body through cuts and scrapes and can cause painful muscle tightening (including in the jaw). 1 in 5 can die if breathing muscles are affected. Many adults do not have high enough titres of tetanus antitoxin even after receiving the vaccine. As a result a booster dose is recommended every 10 years. It is available in the Tdap and Td vaccine.

IMMUNIZATION

Getting immunized is important at any age, and keeping up to date with them is the best way to minimize complications from serious illnesses. Each province manages their own vaccine programs; please refer to your provincial health programs for more information on vaccine schedules, including a listing of publically funded vaccines.

You can also refer to the Health Canada information on vaccines at: phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/cig-gci/index-eng.php

References available upon request.

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