



Help your tweens and teens stay healthy to adulthood. Texas physicians want you to know the facts — vaccines for adolescents are important, safe, and effective.

The Facts About Adolescent Vaccines

Vaccinations are important. Like eating healthy foods, being active, and getting regular check-ups, vaccines play a vital role in keeping adolescents healthy. Yet many adolescents are not vaccinated as recommended, leaving them vulnerable to illness, suffering, and possibly even death. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends specific vaccinations for your preteen or teen to protect against diseases and infections that pose a greater risk for them, such as meningitis.

Vaccines are safe. Study after study has shown vaccines to be safe. Doctors cannot use a vaccine unless the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved it as safe and effective. Even after the FDA approves a vaccine, it continues to be studied to ensure its safety.

Vaccines build your immune system to fight disease. Some adolescents can have side effects from a shot, just as they can when taking a medication. But most side effects are minor and temporary, such as a sore arm or fever. Some symptoms may mimic a disease, such as a few red bumps after a chickenpox vaccine, but these are an immune response to the vaccine and not the disease itself.

Vaccinations are effective. Vaccines have wiped out polio and smallpox in the United States. Many other diseases — such as tetanus and diphtheria — that once killed thousands of children now are so rare in the United States you hardly hear about them. And medical research has developed new vaccines to protect adolescents from meningitis and HPV. Plus, keeping your child up to date on his or her vaccines keeps the entire community healthy.

Adolescents need vaccinations. Even though your adolescent may have had all recommended vaccinations as a baby or young child, more vaccinations are needed as he or she ages. These vaccinations are recommended for adolescents aged 11 and 12 years:

- Meningococcal disease: Protects against meningitis and other serious illnesses (booster dose needed at 16 years of age).
- Tdap (tetanus-diphtheria and acellular pertussis): Prevents against lockjaw and whooping cough.
- HPV (human papillomavirus): Protects against the virus that causes cervical cancer and genital warts.
- Influenza: Protects against seasonal flu.

Depending which vaccines your child received as an infant, he or she may need other vaccines during adolescence. The next time your child is sick or needs a sports physical, ask your doctor which shots your adolescent needs.

HPV vaccine can be given to girls and boys. HPV infection is spread through sexual contact and can cause several illnesses — cervical cancer for girls, and genital warts and some head and neck cancers for boys and girls. The HPV vaccine, given in three doses, was developed to prevent the HPV infections that cause these illnesses. One of the vaccines even has been shown to protect against other cancers, including vaginal and anal. The vaccine is only effective when given before a person gets the virus, and can be given between ages 9 and 26. For girls, the HPV vaccine is a recommended adolescent vaccine. For boys, parents can decide if the vaccine is right for their sons by talking with their doctor.

Vaccines are required for college. Texas law requires students entering college to get a meningococcal vaccine, which prevents several types of meningitis and blood infections. Bacterial meningitis, unlike meningitis caused by viruses, is extremely serious and can spread quickly in group settings, such as college dorms. About 11 percent of people who get meningitis die from it — often within hours of the onset of symptoms — even if they have begun treatment. Of those who recover, as many as 20 percent suffer serious after-effects, including permanent hearing loss, limb loss, organ failure, or brain damage.



Be Wise — ImmunizeSM

Physicians Caring for Texans

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