



Your Health Advocacy and Information Newsletter

August is National Immunization Awareness Month

August, 2009

August is recognized as National Immunization Awareness Month (NIAM). The goal of NIAM is to increase awareness about immunizations across the life span, from infants to the elderly.

August is the perfect time to remind family, friends, co-workers, and those in the community to catch up on their vaccinations. Parents are enrolling their children in school, students are entering college, and healthcare workers are preparing for the upcoming flu season.

Why are immunizations important?

Immunization is one of the most significant public health achievements of the 20th century. Vaccines have eradicated smallpox, eliminated wild poliovirus in the United States, and significantly reduced the number of cases of measles, diphtheria, rubella, pertussis and other diseases. But despite these efforts, people in the U.S. still die from these and other vaccine-preventable diseases.

Vaccines offer safe and effective protection from infectious diseases. 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 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 of all ages and seniors, and making sure that we receive these immunizations, are critical to protecting ourselves and our communities from disease.

When are immunizations given?

Because children are particularly vulnerable to infection, most vaccines are given during the first five to six years of life. Other immunizations are recommended during adolescent or adult years and, for certain vaccines, booster immunizations are recommended throughout life. Vaccines against certain diseases that may be encountered when traveling outside of the U.S. are recommended for travelers to specific regions of the world.

Common Questions About Vaccine Safety

Vaccines are held to the highest standard of safety. The United States currently has the safest, most effective vaccine supply in history. Years of testing are required by law before a vaccine can be licensed. Once in use, vaccines are continually monitored for safety and efficacy. However, like any medication, immunizations can cause side effects.



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Are Vaccines Tested and Monitored for Safety?

Yes. Before vaccines are licensed, the FDA requires testing to ensure safety. This process can take 10 years or longer. Once a vaccine is in use, the CDC and FDA monitor its adverse events through the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS). Any hint of a problem with a vaccine prompts further investigations by the CDC and FDA. If researchers find a vaccine may be causing a side effect, the CDC and FDA will initiate actions appropriate to the nature of the problem. This may include the changing of vaccine labels or packaging, distributing safety alerts, inspecting manufacturers' facilities and records, withdrawing recommendations for the use of the vaccine, or revoking the vaccine's license.

Who Should Not Be Vaccinated?

Some people should not get certain vaccines or should wait to get them. For instance, children with compromised immune systems, as occurs with cancer patients, often need to wait to be vaccinated. Similarly, if a person has had a severe allergic reaction to a vaccine, a subsequent dose is not recommended. However, a person with a mild, common illness, such as a cold with a low-grade fever, does not have to wait to be vaccinated.

What Should I Do If Someone Has a Reaction to a Vaccine?

- Call a doctor. If the reaction is severe, take the person to a doctor immediately.
- Tell your doctor what happened, when it happened, and when the vaccination was given.
- Ask your doctor, nurse or health department to file a VAERS form, or call VAERS yourself at 1-800-822-7967.

What are Possible Side Effects of Immunization?

Each person is unique and may react differently to immunization.

- Occasionally, people who receive a vaccine do not respond to it and may still get the illness the vaccine was meant to protect them against.
- In most cases, vaccines are effective and cause no side effects, or only mild reactions such as fever or soreness at the injection site.

- Very rarely, people experience more serious side effects, like allergic reactions. Be sure to tell your health care provider if you have health problems or known allergies to medications or food.
- Severe reactions to vaccines occur so rarely that the risk is difficult to calculate.

To view and print the 2009 Child & Adolescent Immunization Schedule follow:

<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/recs/schedules/adult-schedule.htm>

The Schedules list the ages (birth through 6 years old and 7 through 18 years old) for when each vaccine or series of shots is to be given. If your child or adolescent has missed any shots, consult the catch-up schedule AND check with your doctor about getting back on track.

To view and print the 2009 Adult Immunization Schedules and Adult Vaccination Screening Form follow:

<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/recs/schedules/adult-schedule.htm>

It can sometimes be difficult to understand or keep track of exactly which vaccines you need. Use the Adult Vaccination Screening Form to help you understand what vaccines might be important for you. Questions on the form help you and your doctor decide which vaccines you need and when to get them. You can print the form, fill it out, and take it with you to the office the next time you see your doctor. The clinician's version of the form can be distributed and used in clinics and healthcare professionals' offices.

