

Vaccines for Teens and Preteens: Answers to Your Top Questions



Wondering about shots for your preteen or teen?

You're not alone! This fact sheet has been reviewed by pediatricians and infectious disease experts. Use it to help you protect your child's health.

1. What shots does my child need?

- Tdap protects against 3 diseases: tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis ("whooping cough")
- Meningococcal
- Human Papillomavirus (or HPV) 3 shots over 6 months
- Flu (shot or nasal spray) each year
- Catch-up booster shots: your child may be behind on a 2nd dose of chickenpox or MMR vaccine (measles, mumps, and rubella).

2. At what age should my child be vaccinated?

Most shots are due at ages 11-12. Teens also need a meningococcal booster shot at 16. The whole family needs flu shots or the flu nasal spray every year.

3. Why at these ages?

Doctors recommend shots to protect preteens and teens against diseases they may face sooner or later. Getting shots now will protect them for many years to come. In some cases, booster shots are needed because protection from earlier shots fades overtime.

4. Is it okay to get multiple shots in one visit?

Yes. Your child's healthy immune system can handle several shots with no problem. The Institute of Medicine has reviewed all solid scientific studies and agrees that getting several shots in one visit is safe— for teens and babies. If your child can't get all needed shots in one visit, you may need to come back soon. Check with the doctor.

5. Can all shots be taken care of at one visit?

Your child can get all recommended shots in one visit. However, it takes 6 months to complete the 3-dose HPV series. So you'll have to schedule follow-up shot visits to finish the HPV series.

6. My child is nervous about shots. What can I do to help?

It's normal to get a little nervous. Suggest deep breaths or listening to music to help relax. Offer praise for the courage of getting through the appointment.

7. What kind of side-effects might I see?

The most common side effects are redness, swelling and a sore arm where the shot was given. If your child plays sports, you might not want to schedule a shot visit right before a game.

Teens faint more easily after shots or events that may be stressful. To help protect them, it's a good idea to sit or lay down for 15 minutes after getting shots.

Worried about safety?

Have questions about the vaccines and the diseases they prevent?

See next page for safety facts.



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"Sometimes at the end of our coughing fits we couldn't get any air and ended up throwing up."
—Emily, whooping cough survivor.

Whooping Cough (pertussis) can make kids cough so hard it can make them throw up or break ribs. Coughing can last for months.

Tdap vaccine protects against whooping cough (plus tetanus and diphtheria). The most common side effects include pain and redness where the shot was given. A severe allergy happens less than one time in a million shots given.



"If I could save one child from going through my pain, then I feel like my job is done."
—Heather, died of cervical cancer.

HPV infection affects over 50% of Americans and can cause cervical cancer in girls later in life. It also causes throat and mouth cancers, certain other cancers and genital warts, in both men and women, even teens.

HPV vaccine safety monitoring has been in place since 2006. The US and other countries have given hundreds of million of vaccinations. The most common side-effects are fainting and pain at the injection site. Serious side-effects are very rare including headache, dizziness or nausea.



"They were sure I was a goner. My mom couldn't handle it so she ran into a small conference room...to plead to God for my life."
—Luke, flu Survivor

Flu can send even healthy kids to the hospital. Usually, more than 100 children die every year after catching the flu.

Flu vaccine is needed every year. Researchers have found it safe for children of all ages. Anyone with certain allergies (e.g., eggs, latex) should check with the doctor before getting vaccinated. The risk of a severe allergic reaction is less than one in a million.



"When I found out... I laughed and said, you'll be itching for a while. Little did I know...He vomited all night. By the next morning, his kidneys had failed."
—Adam lives with multiple health problems after chickenpox.

Chickenpox is more than just an itchy rash. The disease can be severe in older children and adults. While many cases are milder, the "pox" sores can get infected. It used to be that over 10,000 Americans ended up in the hospital every year and 100 died—just from chickenpox!

Chickenpox (varicella) vaccine is very safe. The most common side effects are mild: a rash, fever, or redness and pain where the shot was given. Serious side effects are very rare—only a few instances have ever been seen in over 20 years of use.



"It was 13 hours before she experienced... a sore throat, until the time she was pronounced dead... It was 8 days before her 16th birthday."
—MaryJo, died of meningococcal meningitis

Meningococcal disease is spread by coughing, kissing, or sharing drinks. It can cause fatal infections or brain damage. Amputations may be needed to save a patient's life.

Meningococcal vaccine is very effective in preventing the disease. Common side-effects include redness or pain where the shot was given. Less often, some people get a fever. Serious allergic reactions are very rare.

Looking for more information?

When it comes to health decisions for your children, you want reliable information. Be a truth-seeker and ask your doctor. Or, look for trusted sources on preteen and teen vaccines—like these:

Possible Side Effects from Vaccines
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
cdc.gov/vaccines/vac-gen/side-effects.htm

Vaccine Information Statements
cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/vis/index.html

American Academy of Pediatrics
<http://www2.aap.org/immunization/>

Your Preteens and Teens Need Shots Too!
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
cdc.gov/Features/PreteenVaccines/