

AgePage

Shots for Safety

There are many shots, or vaccinations, that may keep you from getting sick. Some of these shots may also protect you from getting a serious form of the illness. Here is a list of shots that may keep you healthy. Talk to your doctor about which ones you need.



Flu

Flu is the short name for influenza. It can cause fever, chills, sore throat, and stuffy nose, as well as headache and muscle aches. It's easy to pass from person to person. Flu is very serious when it gets in your lungs. That's why it's so important to get a flu shot.

The virus that causes flu changes from year to year. This means you need to get the flu shot every year. It takes a while for the medicine in the flu shot

to start protecting you, so you should get your flu shot between October and November. Then you will be protected when the winter flu season starts.

Pneumococcal Disease

Pneumococcal disease is a serious infection that is spread from person to person by droplets in the air. It can cause problems with your lungs, or it can spread to other parts of the body. People 65 and older should get a pneumococcal shot. It's safe and can be given at the same time as the flu shot. Most people only need a single shot. But, if you were younger than 65 when you had the shot, you may need a second shot to stay protected.

Remember....

Some illnesses or treatments can weaken your immune system. It's important to talk to a doctor who knows your health history before taking any vaccine.

Tetanus and Diphtheria

Getting a shot is the best way to keep from getting tetanus and diphtheria.

Tetanus (sometimes called lockjaw) is caused by bacteria found in soil, dust, and manure. It enters the body through cuts in the skin.

Diphtheria is also caused by bacteria. It can affect the tonsils, throat, nose, or skin. It can spread from person to person. Diphtheria is a very serious illness.

Most people get their first shots for tetanus and diphtheria as children. For adults, a booster shot keeps you protected; it's important to get it every 10 years. Ask your doctor if you need a booster shot.

Shingles

If you had chickenpox when you were young, the virus is still in your body. When you are older, the virus may become active again and you can develop shingles. Shingles causes a rash of blisters on the body or face. It can be a very painful disease. Even when the rash disappears, the pain can stay. Now there is a shot for people 60 or older that may prevent shingles. Ask your doctor if you should get the shingles vaccine. Check with your health insurance to see if the cost of the shot is covered.

Measles, Mumps, and Rubella

The vaccine given to children to prevent measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) has made these diseases rare. Measles, mumps, and rubella are often more serious in adults than in children. If you don't know if you've had the diseases or the shots, you can still get the shot.

Side Effects of Shots

Common side effects for these shots are mild and include pain, swelling, or redness on the arm where the shot was given. It's a good idea to keep your own shot record listing the types and dates of your shots, as well as any side effects or problems.

Travel

Check with your doctor or local health department about the shots that you need if you're going to travel to other countries. Sometimes a series of shots is needed. It's best to get them early, at least 2 weeks before your travel. For information about

shots you may need, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at www.cdc.gov/travel or call the information line for international travelers at 877-394-8747.

Keep Up-to-date

Most of the illnesses listed in this fact sheet are much harder on adults than on children. Take the time to protect yourself by keeping your vaccinations up-to-date.

For More Information

Here are some Federal and non-Federal resources:

American Lung Association

800-586-4872 (toll-free)

www.lungusa.org

Centers for Disease Control Info

800-232-4636 (toll-free)

www.cdc.gov

National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases

866-284-4107 (toll-free)

800-877-8339 (toll-free/TDD)

www.niaid.nih.gov

For more information on health and aging, including the free brochures about shingles and flu, contact:

**National Institute on Aging
Information Center**

P.O. Box 8057

Gaithersburg, MD 20898-8057

800-222-2225 (toll-free)

800-222-4225 (toll-free/TTY)

www.nia.nih.gov

www.nia.nih.gov/Espanol

To sign up for regular email alerts about new publications and other information from the NIA, go to *www.nia.nih.gov/HealthInformation*.

Visit NIH Senior Health

(*www.nihseniorhealth.gov*), a senior-friendly website from the National Institute on Aging and the National Library of Medicine. This website has health information for older adults. Special features make it simple to use. For example, you can click on a button to have the text read out loud or to make the type larger.



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