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August 15, 2011

WELLNESS WEEKLY

Immunization Awareness

If you are not sure you or your child's vaccinations are current, August is National Immunization Awareness Month, a good time to review your needs with your provider. You never outgrow the need for vaccines. The specific immunizations you need as an adult are determined by factors such as your age, lifestyle, high-risk conditions, type and locations of travel, and previous immunizations. Throughout your adult life, you need immunizations to get and maintain protection against: flu, tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis, shingles, pneumococcal, HPV, etc.

How do vaccines work?

Vaccines work by introducing your body to a very small amount of material that's similar to a specific virus or bacteria, or in some cases, a weakened form of the virus. This causes the body's immune system to produce antibodies against those diseases, so that in the future, if you are exposed to a particular disease like tetanus or chicken pox, your body can quickly respond to prevent infection.

Why you should not wait to vaccinate

Children under 5 are especially susceptible to disease because their immune systems have not built up the necessary defenses to fight infection. By immunizing on time (by age 2), you can protect your child from disease and also protect others at school or daycare.

Over time immunity wanes and the body's ability to fight off infection decreases unless the booster shot is given to literally boost the body's immune response. Recently it was determined that immunity to chickenpox wanes after only one vaccination, so now two doses are recommended with the first dose at 12 months and the second at four to five years.

Today's vaccines are very safe and effective. However, side effects can occur with any medicine, including vaccines. Depending on the vaccine, side effects can include: slight fever, rash, or soreness at the site of injection. Slight discomfort is normal and should not be a cause for alarm.

Yearly flu vaccination should begin in September or as soon as vaccine is available and continue throughout the influenza season, into December, January, and beyond. This is because the timing and duration of influenza seasons vary. While influenza outbreaks can happen as early as October, most of the time influenza activity peaks in January or later.



The website www.cdc.gov/vaccines is created by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention and is a good source of information regarding immunization schedules. It may also answer any additional questions you may have.

General immunization questions can also be answered by The CDC Contact Center at 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636 English and Español)

The CDC recommendations for adult vaccines include:

- **Influenza (flu):** every fall for most everyone, especially those age 50 and over
- **Tetanus and Diphtheria:** booster every 10 years
- **Pneumococcal (pneumonia):** for ages 65 and over and those with chronic conditions
- **Varicella (chickenpox):** for anyone who has not had chicken pox
- **Measles, Mumps, and Rubella (MMR):** for anyone who is unvaccinated or hasn't contracted these diseases