



The Importance of Adult Immunizations: A H A N D O U T F O R P A T I E N T S

- Vaccines (“shots”) are not just for children, some also protect (“immunize”) adults from sickness.
- Each year in the United States, more adults than children die from a sickness that a shot could have prevented.¹
- Adult vaccine recommendations are reviewed and published each year.²
- Adults who are vaccinated protect others around them from getting sick, including young children who haven’t received their shots and family members or close contacts who are in poor health.

The following are a few true stories about adults and vaccine-preventable illnesses:

A Son’s Life Cut Short by Influenza

“**M**y son, Jacob Ryan Schmidt of Baytown, TX, was a semi-pro competitive martial arts expert, strong as a bull and enjoying life as a family man. In April of 2010, at the age of 27, he succumbed to complications from H1N1 influenza.

He had not been vaccinated against the illness. Jacob was not someone you’d expect to fall ill to influenza. He was healthy and athletic, and built like a freight train. He was a leader and a fighter. Surely, he had the fortitude and strength in him to beat the disease. I was confident that he would recover. The disease took a heavy and rapid toll. His lungs collapsed; he developed an infection. His organs were shutting down. After about five weeks of influenza ravaging his body, Jacob died. He had a bright future ahead, snuffed out by influenza. It hurts to know he could have been vaccinated, but wasn’t.

I hadn’t been vaccinated either, nor was my 18-year-old son, but after visiting Jacob in the intensive care unit, my son and I both got vaccinated. Talk to your doctor before this happens. I wish Jacob had.”

– Sharon McFadden, “Real People, Real Stories,”
National Foundation for Infectious Diseases (www.adultvaccination.com)³



The Pain of Shingles

“I had shingles recently and I just need to say—the pain from shingles was the worst I’ve ever felt. The pain was in my back and at first, I figured it was sciatica. But the pain kept getting worse until one day I had to go to the emergency room. The doctor told me to get an MRI to see if there was a back problem. I said to him that if I didn’t know better I would think that it was shingles because nothing alleviated the pain. He said that it might very well be and that in some cases the rash comes out after the pain – and sometimes never. We were right – the rash appeared about five days later and my own physician confirmed that I had shingles. I’m an active and healthy woman. I work full-time as a special education teacher, I travel a lot, and spend time at the theater. I didn’t want to let shingles slow me down. But the truth is, the pain was just awful.

At night, in particular, it was so bad that I couldn’t sleep. If I had known that a vaccine is recommended for everyone my age, I would have gotten it. Believe me, if you could understand the pain of shingles, you’d get the vaccine, too.”

– Joan, “Real People, Real Stories,”
National Foundation for Infectious Diseases (www.adultvaccination.com)³

A Doctor Who Infected her Daughter with Whooping Cough

“A resident (MD) rotating at a children’s hospital developed a cough and subsequently noticed that her daughter, a preschooler, came down with a cough. Pertussis (whooping cough) was found in patients at the hospital, and the doctor determined that she may have acquired pertussis from children in the hospital where she worked, and then taken it home to her daughter. The doctor and her daughter were tested, and both were diagnosed with whooping cough. Both mother and daughter responded well to treatment and recovered. The doctor was grateful for her training in medical school about the transmission of pertussis, because it led to prompt testing, diagnosis, and treatment. ”

– Personal communication R. Zimmerman, MD



A Doctor's Personal Experience with Whooping Cough

“**Y**ou’re never too old or too educated to learn something new. In my case, that learning came the hard way. Last year, I had such a severe cough that I could not catch my breath and would even pass out. I coughed so long and so hard that I cracked several ribs. The coughing was so persistent that I could barely sleep. I was lucky if I got a half-hour of shut eye between coughing spasms. Occasionally, I coughed so hard I literally fell out of bed. The pain from coughing was so bad I felt like someone took a sledgehammer to my chest. I thought these coughing fits were because of the work I was doing on my son’s house – no doubt aggravating my asthma. However, the persistence and severity of the coughing led me to seek additional medical input. It took me three months to recover. I was shocked to learn that I had pertussis, also known as whooping cough. Whooping cough? Kids used to get that before the vaccine. In fact, I had not been vaccinated against pertussis since I was a child. What I didn’t realize at the time was that immunity wears off over time, so I was vulnerable to pertussis once again. Adolescents and adults are supposed to get a booster shot to raise their immunity. And I can tell you that the vaccine works. How do I know? My wife, a volunteer in the neonatal intensive unit, was vaccinated – she was required to get the vaccine to work there. Of course my wife was very close to me throughout my illness and despite the fact that pertussis is highly contagious, she did not cough once. She was spared the difficult and painful experience. Now, in large part because of my experience, my institution requires all employees be vaccinated against pertussis. And that’s a good thing. Anyone – doctor, parent, grandparent, caregiver, who comes into contact with infants, should be sure they are up to date on their immunizations...to spare those too young to be protected through vaccination and to spare themselves a very painful and debilitating experience.”





– William James Cochran, MD, FAAP
Pediatric Gastroenterologist and Vice Chairman
Geisinger Health System • Janet Weis Children’s Hospital, Danville, PA
“Real People, Real Stories,” National Foundation for Infectious Diseases
(www.adultvaccination.com)³

References


1. Poland G. A global prescription for adult immunization: time is catching up with us. *Vaccine*. 2010;28:7137-7139.
2. CDC. Recommended adult immunization schedule--United States, 2012. *MMWR Wkly Rep*. 2012. 61(4):1-7.
3. National Foundation for Infectious Diseases. Real Stories, Real People. <http://www.adultvaccination.com/real-stories-real-people>. Accessed May 2012.



The following table is a summary of currently recommended shots for adults. Talk with your doctor about which shots you need to protect yourself and your loved ones from vaccine-preventable diseases.

Vaccine	Do I Need this Shot?*
Influenza	All adults: YES!
Pneumococcal	Age 65 years and older: YES! Smoke cigarettes: YES! Asthma: YES! Diabetes: YES! Chronic lung, heart or liver disease: YES! Other chronic health conditions: MAYBE 
Tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis (Td/Tdap)	All adults: YES!
Human papillomavirus (HPV)	Women through age 26 years: YES! Men through age 21 years: YES! Men who have sex with men through age 26 years: YES!
Zoster/Shingles	Age 60 years and older: YES!
Hepatitis B	Adults 19–59 years with diabetes: YES! Adults with risk factors for hepatitis B: YES!  (ask your doctor if you have any risk factors) Adults who want protection from hepatitis B: YES!
Hepatitis A	Adults with risk factors for hepatitis A: YES!  (ask your doctor if you have any risk factors) Adults who want protection from hepatitis A: YES!
Measles, Mumps, Rubella (MMR)	People born in or after 1957 and haven't received the shot: YES!
Varicella	Adults who have not had chickenpox or the shot before: YES!
Meningococcal	First-year college students ages 19–21 years who plan to live in a residence hall and haven't received the shot: YES! Adults with risk factors for meningococcal disease: YES! (ask your doctor if you have any risk factors)  Adults who want protection from meningococcal disease: YES!

* Some people should not receive certain shots due to contraindications, such as a severe reaction to a shot or certain medical conditions. Your health care team will discuss any possible contraindications with you prior to giving any shots.

 Where you see this symbol, or if you are unsure, ask your health care team if you need this shot