



## Tips for Improving Adult Immunization Coverage

National data indicate that significant gaps exist in immunization coverage for adults in the US. For example, influenza vaccination coverage for the 2010-2011 season ranged from 30.5% for 18–49 year olds, to 39% for high-risk 18–49 year olds, and 66.6% for those ≥ 65 years.<sup>1</sup> The Healthy People (HP) 2020 goals for influenza coverage in each of these patient groups are 80, 90, and 90%, respectively.<sup>2</sup> The 2010 National Health Interview survey estimated pneumococcal (polysaccharide vaccine PPSV23) vaccination coverage for high-risk adults 19–64 years at 18.5%, and 59.7% for adults ≥ 65 years.<sup>3</sup> These values are well below the HP 2020 goals of 60 and 90%, respectively for pneumococcal vaccination in these groups.<sup>2</sup> Opportunities for improvement in adult vaccination coverage also exist for tetanus (Td/Tdap), hepatitis A, hepatitis B, herpes zoster (shingles), and human papillomavirus.<sup>3</sup>

Immunizations represent an effective strategy for preventing or minimizing infectious disease, yet the statistics above indicate that many adults are not receiving recommended immunizations. Several surveys have been conducted to better understand the factors that contribute to low vaccination rates among adults. Frequently cited barriers to adult immunization are included in Table 1.<sup>4</sup>

**Table 1: Barriers to Adults Immunization<sup>4</sup>**

- **Lack of coordination of adult immunization activities**
- **Lack of public knowledge**
- **Lack of provider recommendations for immunization**
- **Financial impediments to vaccinations**
- **Lack of access to, and utilization of, health care services by adults**
- **Lack of utilization of reminder or assessment systems**
- **Racial/ethnic disparities**
- **Health literacy**
- **Concern about adverse events**

In order to improve adult vaccination rates, a number of strategies have been recommended to address patient, provider, and system-based barriers to adult immunizations. A toolkit for adult immunizations and standing orders program developed by Dr. R. Zimmerman, et al from the Department of Family Medicine and Clinical Epidemiology, University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine is available through the Society for Teachers of Family Medicine Group on Immunization Education Web site ([www.immunized.org](http://www.immunized.org)).<sup>5</sup> This practice improvement resource includes “Four Pillars of a Successful Adult Vaccination Program” that may help clinicians address adult immunization barriers within their clinical practice. Many of these concepts are consistent with the principles of a Patient-Centered Medical Home.<sup>6</sup>

### **Convenient Adult Vaccination Services<sup>5</sup>**

This issue is particularly important for influenza vaccination. While the typical vaccination season for influenza is October and November, many adults will not be seen during this time frame. Extending the influenza season by starting as early as August or September and continuing into January can help to increase vaccination coverage. “Express” influenza vaccination clinics can allow practices to manage large numbers of patients in an efficient manner. Offering weekend or evening vaccine clinics, having a dedicated influenza vaccination station, and open access vaccine scheduling during office hours are examples of expanding access for patients.

### **Patient Notification about the Importance of Vaccination and the Availability of Convenient Programs<sup>5</sup>**

Several studies have reported that many adults are unaware of their risk for vaccine-preventable diseases or the availability of vaccines for adults.<sup>7-9</sup> Providers need to communicate with patients about the importance of vaccination and specific recommendations based on medical conditions or risk for vaccine-preventable diseases. Clinicians can easily access immunization schedules and printable handouts about adult immunizations from the CDC and the Immunization Action Coalition to share with patients. Provider recommendations are a significant factor in patient acceptance of vaccines, and studies have demonstrated that provider recommendations can overcome negative patient attitudes about vaccination.<sup>10</sup> The importance of vaccinations should be a consistent message from all staff within a practice. Patients can be notified about adult vaccines and convenient vaccine services via email, mail, autodialer, answering system messages while “on-hold,” office posters, social media, and public service announcements.



### Enhanced Office Vaccination Systems<sup>5</sup>

Several systems-based approaches can positively impact immunization rates and reduce missed opportunities for vaccinating adults. Establish assessment of adult vaccination status as a routine part of all office visits. This assessment can be accomplished by nursing staff, and may be prompted by reminders within electronic medical records, through review of the Health Maintenance or immunization tab in medical records, or simply as a routine part of vital signs (“Are the patient’s immunizations up to date?”). The use of standing orders programs allow clinical staff (nurses, medical assistants) to evaluate patient eligibility for adult vaccines and vaccinate per protocol without an individual MD order. Standing orders for adult vaccines are available through the Immunization Action Coalition (<http://www.immunize.org/standing-orders/>). Providers can capitalize on flu season to make a concerted effort on vaccinations, for example by offering pneumococcal vaccine and Td/Tdap when influenza vaccine is offered.

### Motivation—Office Immunization Champion<sup>5</sup>

Systematically monitoring immunization rates within clinical practice is part of continuous quality improvement. An immunization champion can help to prioritize immunizations and be a driving force to set goals for immunization coverage within a practice. Progress toward immunization goals can be tracked on a weekly basis and shared with the health care team. Monitoring immunization rates can provide motivation for change (if progress is lacking) or reinforcement of best practices (when achievement is good).

### Stay Current with Immunization Schedules and Recommendations

Staying current with immunization schedules and recommendations can be challenging. Many resources are available to help:

- **Shots:** The Society for Teachers of Family Medicine Group on Immunization Education has developed an app for iPhone/iPod, iPad, Android, and PC that includes the childhood, adolescent, and adult immunization schedules for the US, and vaccine-specific information such as high risk indications, adverse reactions, contraindications, catch-up, administration, risk communication, and epidemiology. Accessed via: <http://www.immunized.org> or <http://itunes.apple.com/>
- **ACP Immunization Advisor:** An immunization app from the American College of Physicians. Accessed via: <http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/acp-immunization-advisor/id503636536>.
- Bookmark the **CDC Vaccines and Immunization home page** on office computers and engage everyone in the care team to obtain and share up-to-date immunization information. Accessed via: <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/>
- The **current immunization schedules** for all age groups are available for download and printing from the CDC. Accessed via: <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/recs/schedules/default.htm>
- **Email Updates from the CDC:** Sign up to receive a variety of publications including *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, and updates from the CDC. This is an excellent way to stay current with immunization recommendations, developments from the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), and related issues. Click on "Get Email Updates": <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/default.htm>
- **Email Updates from the Immunization Action Coalition:** Subscribe to free email news service and periodicals from the Immunization Action Coalition. This is another excellent way for all members of the care team to stay current with vaccine recommendations, licensures, and other immunization information. Click on "Get Email Updates": <http://www.immunize.org/>
- “**Keeping Up-to-Date with Immunization Practices,**” by DB Middleton, et al. *Prim Care Clin Office Pract.* 2011;38:747-761.<sup>11</sup>

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