



FROM THE CHAMPS PARISH NURSE

Are Your Immunizations Up To Date?

Sometimes we become careless about watching out for our own health and keeping our immunizations current. Often we focus on just the needs of children forgetting that serious infections can occur in adults too. The CDC “strongly encourages older adults to be immunized against flu, pneumococcal disease, tetanus, diphtheria, and chicken pox as well as measles, mumps and rubella.” (April, 2007)
Always consult your health care provider

for medical advice regarding immunizations needed especially if you have a compromised immune system, chronic disease(s), or will be traveling outside the U.S. In fact, if you are planning to travel outside the U.S., contact the local health department or your physician at least 4 to 6 weeks in advance of the planned travel dates to review immunization requirements.

Flu

There are new flu viruses evolving annually therefore obtaining a flu shot each year is essential. The CDC information for 2007 says: “October or November is the best time to get vaccinated, but you can still get vaccinated in December and later. People who should get vaccinated each year and who are at high risk for complications from the flu, include:

- Children aged 6 months until their fifth birthday
- Pregnant women,
- People 50 years of age and older,
- People of any age with certain chronic medical conditions
- People who live in nursing homes and other long term care facilities.

Pneumococcal Disease

Persons 65 and older should get the pneumococcal vaccine. Most people only need a single dose, however persons 65 and older should receive a second dose if they received the shot more than 5 years previously and were younger than 65 when vaccinated the first time. (No one should receive more than 2 total doses of the pneumococcal vaccine available now.)

Tetanus (Lockjaw) and Diphtheria

Children receive DTP shots (diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis) vaccine. Adults receive a combination shot of Td (tetanus-diphtheria) every 10 years. If a severe cut or puncture wound occurs, update your shot if you haven’t had a booster in the past 5 to 10 years. According to 2006-2007 CDC guidelines, Tdap should replace a single dose of Td for adults aged <65 years who have not previously received a dose of Tdap (either in the primary series, as a booster, or for wound management.)

Chickenpox (Varicella)

Chickenpox in children may be mild, but in adults it can cause greater symptoms. Persons having had actual chickenpox are protected from getting it again. Two doses of the chickenpox vaccine are recommended for people 13 years of age and older. Some individuals may develop shingles later in life which is caused by a regrowth of the same virus that produces chickenpox.

Shingles

In May 2006 the CDC cleared the vaccine -- known as Zostavax -- for use in adults age 60 and older for prevention of shingles: studies showed it can prevent shingles roughly half the time. However, persons with a weakened immune system (e.g. cancer therapy, transplant patients, HIV/AIDS and others) cannot receive this vaccine because it contains a live but weakened chickenpox virus.

Measles, Mumps and Rubella

Most individuals have had this vaccine as a child, but everyone born in or after 1957 should have at least one dose of the vaccine sometime after their first birthday.

These diseases are more severe if found in an adult therefore some adults individuals such as health care workers and persons who travel outside the U.S. may need a second dose of the vaccine.

Human Papillomavirus (HPV)

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention STD Prevention Division recommendations are:

The HPV vaccine is recommended for 11-12 year-old girls, and can be given to girls as young as 9. The vaccine is also recommended for 13-26 year-old girls/women who have not yet received or completed the vaccine series.

Ideally, females should get the vaccine before they are sexually active. This is because the vaccine is most effective in girls/women who have not yet acquired any of the four HPV types covered by the vaccine. Girls/women who have not been infected with any of those four HPV types will get the full benefits of the vaccine.

Females who are sexually active may also benefit from the vaccine. But they may get less benefit from the vaccine since they may have already acquired one or more HPV type(s) covered by the vaccine. Few young women are infected with all four of these HPV types. So they would still get protection from those types they have not acquired. Currently, there is no test available to tell if a girl/woman has had any or all of these four HPV types.

The vaccine has been widely tested in 9-to-26 year-old girls/women. But research on the vaccine's safety and efficacy has only recently begun with women older than 26 years of age. The FDA will consider licensing the vaccine for these women when there is research to show that it is safe and effective for them.

There are other medical conditions that require additional vaccinations such as with Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B and meningococcal vaccine. It is important to maintain a record of your vaccinations and review them periodically with your health care provider for advice that encompasses your personal health care needs.

Additional information related to immunizations is available from:

Center for Disease Control and Prevention www.cdc.gov

American Lung Association www.lungusa.org

National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases www.niaid.nih.gov

Champs
Center for Healthy Aging, Ministries, Programs & Services
13271 Millard Avenue
Omaha, Nebraska 68137
Tel: (402) 895-2224
Website: www.champsonline.info
Email: champs@crossandheart.org

Champs is funded by a grant from the Alegent Health Community Benefit Trust