

IMMUNIZATIONS FOR TEENS AND OLDER CHILDREN

As pediatricians these days, we give many vaccines to babies and young children. But there are still vaccines that older children and teens should receive in order to ensure maximum health.

Some vaccines are specifically indicated for older children. Others perhaps could have been given to your child at an earlier age, but were not. If that is the case, we strongly urge you to consider them now.

Tdap

The Tdap is a relatively new vaccine that protects children (and adults) from both tetanus and pertussis (whooping cough). We have, of course, been giving "tetanus shots" for many, many years. The new vaccine adds protection against pertussis as well.

We used to think that the DPT, given to infants and upon school entry, would protect sufficiently against whooping cough. But we now know that older children, teens, and adults can contract (and spread) this disease.

We will automatically be giving the Tdap at the eleven-year check-up as mandated by Illinois schools. If your older child has not yet received this vaccine, it is extremely important that it be given. (We strongly recommend this vaccine for you, the parent, as well.)

Hepatitis A

Hepatitis A is a viral infection that affects the liver. The name may be confusing to you as we have been giving the Hepatitis B vaccines for some time. (That liver infection is passed through blood and other body fluids while Hepatitis A is passed through stool, affecting some food and drinking water.)

Actually, we have been giving Hepatitis A vaccines selectively for years, but it recently became recommended for all children between one and two years of age. It is a series of two shots, the second to be given at least six months after the first.

Older children and adults can (and should) be given this series as well. Although we have long stressed the importance of this vaccine for children traveling to other parts of the world, we must remember that people from these areas often come here and prepare our restaurant food. Unfortunately, this is an illness that has no effective treatment.

Menactra

Meningococcal disease is a serious bacterial infection, causing meningitis and/or blood infection. Young adults living in college dorms or entering the military are traditionally those most affected by this disease. For this reason, we have long recommended meningococcal vaccination upon college entry. (The military, of course, takes care of it themselves.)

This form of meningococcal vaccine, available since 2005, was once believed to be effective up to ten years. We now realize, however, that protection is often not that long. Current recommendations, therefore, have been changed to vaccinate at 11 or 12 years old with a booster at 16. If your child received this meningitis shot at 15 or younger, a booster shot should be given at 16 to 18. Illinois schools now mandate the Menactra vaccine before 6th and 12th grade.

Trumenba (Meningococcal B Vaccine)

While the meningococcal vaccine Menactra, discussed above, has been used for over a decade, it is not protective against one major strain of that bacteria, serogroup B. Although this strain is not as common as some others, the majority of cases occur in older adolescents and young adults. In fact, this strain has caused seven meningococcal disease outbreaks on college campuses since 2009. Of even greater concern, Meningococcal B disease kills 5-10% of those affected, and it often progresses quickly from vague flu-like symptoms to serious illness or death.

There is now a vaccine, Trumenba, effective against the Meningococcal B disease. This vaccine is given in 2 doses, spaced 6 months apart. Common side-effects include pain at the injection site, fatigue, headache, and muscle pain.

We strongly recommend that all our patients receive the Trumenba vaccine at ages 16 to 18 years, especially if they are planning to live in a college dorm.

Gardasil (Human Papillomavirus Vaccine)

Gardasil is designed to protect young men and women from the most common sexually transmitted disease in the United States. Although originally recommended for girls only, it has long been approved for boys as well. It protects against cervical cancer (the second leading cause of cancer death in women). It also prevents vaginal, vulvar, penile, oral, and anal cancers as well as preventing venereal warts.

Gardasil was released in the U.S. in 2006 and protects against select strains of HPV. Ideally it should be given before beginning sexual activity. It can be given as young as nine, but is recommended at 11-12. Dosing for Gardasil includes a second dose about two months after the first and the third dose six months after the first.

Please note that this vaccine is most effective before sexual activity begins. (And even if your child is abstinent until marriage, they can still acquire this infection from their spouse!)

Influenza Vaccine

There was once a time when physicians only gave "flu shots" to asthmatics and others with chronic disease (and to ourselves, of course, so we would be healthy to treat everyone else!) But as the safety and effectiveness of influenza vaccines have become apparent, recommendations now extend to protecting everyone. We strongly recommend that all persons over 6 months old receive the annual flu vaccine in the fall.

IMMUNIZATIONS FOR YOU, THE PARENT

As you can probably tell, many of these immunizations will also be appropriate for you, the parent. And this can often be an excellent, extra way for you to protect your child. We encourage you to consult your own physician.