



Teens and Young Adults Need Vaccines, Too!

One of the basic beliefs of Public Health is that it is better to prevent people from getting sick in the first place than to have to treat them aggressively when they do get sick. In recent years, several vaccines have been developed that specifically target serious diseases seen in teens and young adults. Since summer is a time when young people congregate, it is also a good time to make sure they are protected from these life-threatening conditions. These conditions include certain types of meningitis, hepatitis, tetanus, diphtheria, whooping cough, and human papilloma viruses.

Meningitis is a potentially life-threatening inflammation or infection of the tissue (called meninges) that covers the brain and the spinal cord. This infection can be caused by many different bacteria and viruses. One type of meningitis particularly targets children and young adults. This meningococcal meningitis can be fatal in as little as 24 hours. By the time it is diagnosed it may already be too late to successfully treat it.

There is a vaccine that prevents this kind of meningitis. It is recommended for children and young adults between the ages of 11 and 24. It is especially important for those who will be attending camps, living in dorms, or spending time in other crowded settings.



Hepatitis literally means inflammation or infection of the liver. The liver is a vital organ. Any infection has the potential to be serious. Hepatitis can also have different causes. The three most common types of hepatitis are caused by three different viruses. They are called "hepatitis A", "hepatitis B", and "hepatitis C". They can all have similar symptoms including a yellowing of the skin and eyes, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, and loss of appetite. Hepatitis C may have no obvious symptoms at all, but it is the infection most likely to cause permanent liver damage.

Hepatitis A can be spread by contaminated food when food workers do not wash their hands properly after using the bathroom. It can also be spread by certain kinds of intimate contact. There is a vaccine for hepatitis A. It is now recommended for both toddlers and adolescents.

Hepatitis B is spread by contact with blood containing the virus. It can also be sexually transmitted. There is a vaccine for hepatitis B, as well as a combined vaccine that protects against both hepatitis A and hepatitis B. Since 2000, Hepatitis B vaccine has been a requirement for children entering junior high school, but some young adults may have missed getting it.

Unfortunately, there is no vaccine yet for **hepatitis C**. This infection is the leading cause of liver failure leading to liver transplantation in the United States today.

Tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis (whooping cough) are diseases that infants and young children are vaccinated against. A booster dose of this vaccine is mandatory for 10 and 11 year olds going into sixth grade. Other teenagers and young adults should receive one dose of this vaccine in place of a regular tetanus and diphtheria vaccine.

Human Papilloma Virus Infections (HPV) affect 80% of sexually active young women at some point during their lifetime, and approximately 50% of sexually active men at any given time. There are many different viruses in the human papilloma family. Some cause cervical cancer. Some cause genital warts. Others have no symptoms at all. There is a new vaccine that protects adolescent and young adult women from getting four of the most common types of HPV. Other than the hepatitis B vaccine, this is the only vaccine ever developed that can prevent cancer. It works best when it is given before young girls become sexually active. It is approved for girls and women between the ages of 9 and 26, and is being studied for future use in older women and men.



The chart below summarizes most of the current vaccine recommendations for adolescents and young adults.

Vaccine recommendations for adolescents and young adults

Vaccine	Dosage
Hepatitis A	2 doses
Hepatitis B	3 doses
HPV	3 doses
Influenza	Once a year
Measles, Mumps, Rubella (MMR)	2 doses
Meningococcus	1 dose
Pneumococcal	1 dose for people with chronic conditions
Tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis (Tdap)	1 booster to replace a Td booster
Tetanus and Diphtheria (Td)	1 booster dose every 10 years
Varicella (Chickenpox)	1 dose

Last but not least, nearly everyone – including teens and young adults - should get a flu shot! Flu kills an average of 36,000 each year, and it can cause even greater mortality if a new flu virus emerges. Flu vaccine is usually available from October through June.

This bottom line is simple: Get vaccinated and protect yourself and those around you. Contact your child's physician or the Ontario County Health Department for more information or to schedule an appointment to receive these vaccines. You can reach Ontario County Public Health at 585 396-4343 or 1-800-299-2995.

You can also visit the Center for Disease Control's web site at www.cdc.gov for more information about these and other diseases and the vaccines that can prevent them.