

Did You Know Your Pre-teen Needs Vaccinations Too?



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As children enter their pre-teen years, their world becomes an exciting place of new experiences and newfound freedoms. But adults know that adolescence also brings new risks and potential dangers, and parents can't be there every minute.

There is something parents *can* do to protect their pre-teens, now and for years to come: make sure their children are vaccinated against potentially life-threatening diseases such as meningitis, whooping cough, and, for girls, cervical cancer.

Vaccines are not just for infants

Many parents don't realize that doctors recommend several immunizations for 11- and 12-year-olds.

"The protection provided by some childhood vaccines wears off over time, and as they get older, young people are at risk of exposure to different diseases at school or camp or in other new situations," says Dr. Anne Schuchat, director of CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases.

"What's more, research shows that pre-teens generally do not get preventive health care, visiting the doctor only when they are sick. We at CDC urge parents to schedule a

routine check-up for their 11- or 12-year-olds to discuss their child's health and development and to talk with the doctor about recommended vaccinations."

What vaccines do pre-teens need?

Three safe and effective vaccines are recommended for 11- or 12-year-olds. All pre-teens should receive Tdap, which combines protection against tetanus, plus highly contagious diphtheria and whooping cough (also known as pertussis), into one shot; and MCV4 to protect against meningitis and its complications. Pre-teen girls should also receive the HPV (human papillomavirus) vaccine – the first-ever vaccine to prevent a disease that kills almost 4,000 American women every year: cervical cancer.

"The vaccine works best when it is given before the onset of sexual activity," says Dr. Schuchat. "And at age 11 and 12, girls have the best and strongest immune response to this vaccine." The American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Family Physicians, and the CDC support these recommendations for pre-teens.

Parents should also make sure their children are up-to-date on other immunizations such as influenza, chickenpox (varicella), hepatitis B and measles-mumps-rubella (MMR). Depending on their health and medical history, some pre-teens may require additional shots.

Information for Parents

To learn more about these vaccines and the diseases they prevent, visit the CDC's pre-teen vaccine website at www.cdc.gov/vaccines/preteen or call (800) CDC-INFO.