

# Tdap/Td Vaccines

## Addressing Common Questions about Tdap/Td Vaccination for Adults

### What diseases do these vaccines protect against?

Tdap vaccine helps protect adults from three diseases:

- **Tetanus (lockjaw):** a serious bacterial disease that causes painful tightening of muscles that can stop muscles from working properly, including the muscles that control breathing
- **Diphtheria:** a very contagious bacterial disease that affects the heart and respiratory system, including the lungs
- **Pertussis (whooping cough):** another very contagious bacterial disease that can cause severe cough and breathing problems

Td, a similar vaccine, provides protection from tetanus and diphtheria, but not whooping cough.

### How common are these diseases?

Tens of thousands of whooping cough cases are reported each year in the U.S. (and many more cases go unreported). There has been an increase in whooping cough cases in recent years, with many states experiencing outbreaks.

The bacteria that cause tetanus can be found everywhere in the environment, including soil. However, this disease is uncommon in the United States. Nearly all cases are among people who never received a tetanus vaccine or adults who didn't stay up to date on their booster shots.

While diphtheria was once a major cause of illness, it is no longer common in the U.S. due to widespread vaccination. However, it is reported in other countries and could be a threat to those who are unvaccinated.

### How are these diseases spread?

Diphtheria and whooping cough are spread from person to person through coughing or sneezing. Tetanus is not spread person to person, but enters the body through cuts, scratches, or wounds.

### Who is at risk for these diseases?

All adults who are not vaccinated or are not up to date with their vaccines are at risk for tetanus and diphtheria. Adults are also at risk for whooping cough even if they were vaccinated as children because the protection wears off over time.

### What could happen if I get these diseases?

**TETANUS (lockjaw)** causes painful muscle tightening and stiffness, usually all over the body. It can lead to tightening of muscles in the head and neck so you can't open your mouth, swallow, or sometimes even breathe. Tetanus kills about 1 out of 5 people who are infected.

**DIPHtheria** can cause weakness, sore throat, fever, and swollen glands in the neck. It can lead to breathing problems, paralysis, and heart failure. Even with treatment, about 1 out of 10 people with diphtheria die.

**PERTUSSIS (whooping cough)** causes severe coughing spells that can cause breathing difficulty. It can also lead to rib fractures, vomiting, loss of bladder control, and sleeping difficulties. Up to 1 in 20 adults with whooping cough is hospitalized or has complications. Adults may pass on whooping cough to infants, who are at most risk for severe illness, hospitalization, and death.

For more information on this and other vaccines for adults, visit [www.cdc.gov/vaccines/adults](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/adults).

DON'T WAIT.  
VACCINATE!



U.S. Department of  
Health and Human Services  
Centers for Disease  
Control and Prevention

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## Who should get Tdap and Td vaccines? When and how often are these vaccines needed?

ALL adults who did not get Tdap vaccine as an adolescent should get one dose of this vaccine. Once they have had this dose, a Td or Tdap booster shot should be given every 10 years.

Pregnant women should get a dose of Tdap vaccine between 27 and 36 weeks of each pregnancy, preferably during the earlier part of this time period. By getting Tdap during pregnancy, mothers pass protection against whooping cough to their baby before birth. For more information on Tdap vaccine for pregnant women, visit [www.cdc.gov/pertussis/pregnant](http://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/pregnant).

## Who should not get this vaccine?

Adults should not get Tdap vaccine if they have had:

- a life-threatening allergic reaction after a dose of any tetanus, diphtheria, or pertussis containing vaccine, or
- a severe allergy to any part of this vaccine.

## How well do these vaccines work?

Since vaccination began, cases of tetanus and diphtheria have dropped by about 99% and cases of whooping cough have dropped by about 80%. If you get Tdap vaccine and still get whooping cough, you are much more likely to have a mild illness with fewer complications and the illness usually won't last as long.

In general, diphtheria, tetanus, and whooping cough vaccines work well, but cannot prevent all cases of these serious diseases. The amount of protection you receive from Tdap vaccine depends on your age and health condition. Getting vaccinated gives you the best protection possible against these diseases.

## How safe are these vaccines?

Tdap and Td vaccines are very safe. They went through years of testing before being licensed by the FDA and continue to be monitored for safety by the FDA and CDC.

### Are they safe to get if I have certain health conditions or am taking prescription meds?

Unless you have had an allergic reaction in the past to these vaccines or have allergies to certain components of the vaccines, they are safe to get. They are safe for people taking prescription medications to get.

## What are the potential side effects of these vaccines?

In most cases, Tdap and Td vaccines cause no side effects, or only mild reactions that last up to a few days, such as pain or swelling where the shot was given, fever, headache, and tiredness. In rare cases, people experience more serious side effects including swelling, severe pain, bleeding and redness in the arm where the shot was given.

## Where can I get these vaccines?

Tdap and Td vaccines may be available at private doctor offices, public or travel health clinics, pharmacies, or other community locations (such as schools/universities). Check with your doctor or pharmacist or use the [Adult Vaccine Finder \(vaccinefinder.org\)](http://vaccinefinder.org) to help you find places that provide Tdap and Td vaccines near you.

## How much do these vaccines cost?

Most private health insurance cover recommended adult vaccines, including Tdap and Td. Check with your insurance provider for details on whether there is any cost to you and for a list of in-network vaccine providers.