

CLUW News Health Tip

ADULT IMMUNIZATION

Childhood vaccines prevent thousands of deaths in children each year and millions of cases of diseases. Unfortunately, many adults do not take advantage of the protection that vaccines offer. An estimated 50,000 to 70,000 adults die each year from vaccine-preventable diseases caused by pneumococci, influenza and hepatitis B. A few will be stricken with tetanus or diphtheria.

Most adults were vaccinated against tetanus and diphtheria as children. Tetanus is an acute infectious disease due to the toxin of tetanus bacteria which may be present in deep wounds. It causes painful muscle spasms. Sometimes it leads to lockjaw in which the jaws become rigidly fixed. The disease is painful and body temperature becomes extremely high. Death often occurs. Diphtheria is also an acute infectious disease caused by a type of bacteria. Infected persons develop severe sore throats. Membrane-like material adheres to their throat or tonsils and they become extremely ill. Their heart and nerves are often affected and death may occur. These diseases are relatively rare in the United States thanks to childhood immunizations, but adults lose this protection over time. School age children are required to get boosters every ten years. All adults should get Td (tetanus and diphtheria vaccine) boosters every ten to 20 years.

To prevent bacterial pneumonia and meningitis, adults should receive PPV (pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine). This is recommended at or before age 60 with a second vaccination at age 65. Any adult with diabetes, respiratory disease, or other chronic health condition should receive this vaccine and not wait until they reach age 60. Influenza vaccine is developed each year in response to the type of flu that is expected to cause a national outbreak. It is usually administered in the fall and is highly recommended for older people and those with chronic diseases.

Hepatitis B causes liver disease. It is spread the same way as HIV which causes AIDS. The main routes of transmission are through unprotected sex and also entry into the bloodstream through an infected needle or a cut or scratch. Unlike HIV, hepatitis B can survive long periods outside the body. It is much more common than HIV. Not everyone infected with Hepatitis B becomes ill. Some people are carriers and are unaware

they are infected. However, they can spread the disease to others who may become severely or fatally ill. Hepatitis B vaccine is administered in three doses. The second dose is given one month after the first. The third dose is given five months later. It is extremely important that health care workers and persons with multiple sex partners receive this vaccine. It is a very safe vaccine but should not be given to persons allergic to yeast.

Your doctor may not routinely check your immunization status or recommend these vaccines. However, if you ask for them, your doctor will usually administer them if they are needed. Take this article with you the next time you visit your doctor and make sure that you get the vaccine protection you need.