



Immunizations: Not just for kids.

If you're a parent, you're probably familiar with the immunization schedule for kids. It outlines what vaccines a child should receive and when. Did you know, though, that there's also one for adults? That's right. Even though we often think of vaccinations as simply being something for kids, adults need them, too. "It's a common misconception that adults are past the stage of needing immunizations," says Samuel Johnson, Jr., MD, primary care provider with West Tennessee Medical Group. "In reality, there are many immunizations that may be called for as an adult, including an annual flu shot. It's important to stay up-to-date on what vaccines you need as you get older."

Why Do Adults Need Immunizations?

It's a pretty common question, and one with an easy answer. Adults need vaccinations for a couple of reasons.

First, immunizations given in childhood can sometimes wear off over time, making a "booster shot" a necessity to continue the protections the vaccine gives. And second, adults are at a higher risk of developing different medical conditions than children are. That means that they need vaccinations against illnesses that kids do not.

Still not sure why immunizations are needed at all? Every year in the United States and across the world, children and

adults become sick and even die due to illnesses that are preventable. A vaccine is a much safer alternative to exposing yourself to a potentially deadly disease. When you're vaccinated against a certain disease, you are given a dose of weakened or inactivated antigen from that disease, allowing your body to build up defenses against it.

What Immunizations Do I Need as an Adult?

That's a great question—and one best answered by your medical provider! He or she can provide you with individualized guidance based on your age, gender and overall health needs. But we can take a look at common adult immunizations and when and why you might need them:

Influenza Often called the "flu shot," this is a vaccination you should be getting each year. Each year, different strains of the flu are more common, so the vaccine is reformulated every year to try and protect against those strains. Since flu season begins in October and continues through March or April, it's a good idea to get your flu shot by October or November.

Tdap/Td This vaccination protects you from tetanus, diphtheria and whooping cough. If you didn't have this vaccine as a child, you should receive the full Tdap shot now. Women should receive this

immunization during every pregnancy, and every person should receive a booster shot every 10 years.

Zoster If you are age 50 or older, you should get a two-dose series of this vaccine which protects against shingles.

Pneumococcal At age 65 or older, you should receive the PPSV23 vaccine and the PCV13 vaccine to protect against pneumonia, if you haven't had it already. These vaccinations may be recommended to you at a younger age if you have a high-risk medical condition or are a smoker.

HPV You might think of this immunization as being for kids, but actually, the human papillomavirus vaccine can be given to adults, too. If you have not already been vaccinated and are younger than age 26, you should receive this vaccine to protect against HPV. In some cases, men and women ages 27 to 45 may also be vaccinated against HPV, so talk with your provider.

Other Immunizations Adults May Need

The vaccines we've listed above are recommended for nearly every adult. But there are some other immunizations you may need, depending on your individual situation:

- Hepatitis A
- Hepatitis B
- Hib (Haemophilus influenzae type b)
- MMR (measles, mumps, rubella)
- MenACWY (meningococcal ACWY)
- MenB (meningococcal B)
- Varicella (chickenpox)

Your medical provider will be able to talk through any immunizations you need and why.

The Tennessee Department of Health (TDH) is working to ensure that the COVID-19 vaccine can be allocated and distributed to priority populations. You can find more information about the vaccination plan at tn.gov.

West Tennessee Medical Group is the region's largest medical group with over 150 providers and nearly 20 specialties across West Tennessee. **Find a provider at wth.org.**

