Frequently Asked Questions

What immunizations do I need?

If you’re **between the ages of 13 and 18**, these are the immunizations you should’ve had at some point, or should get if you’ve never had them:

- hepatitis B vaccine
- tetanus/diphtheria/pertussis (Tdap) vaccine
- inactivated polio vaccine (<18 years of age)
- seasonal influenza (flu) vaccine
- varicella (chickenpox) vaccine
- hepatitis A vaccine
- human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine
- meningococcal vaccine
- measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) vaccine

If you’re **between the ages of 19 and 26**, these are the immunizations you should’ve had at some point, or should get if you’ve never had them:

- seasonal influenza (flu) vaccine
- tetanus/diphtheria/pertussis (Tdap) vaccine
- varicella (chickenpox) vaccine
- human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine
- measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) vaccine

**Big Note:** There are some immunizations that only certain groups of people need. Ask your doctor or other healthcare provider what immunizations you should get to ensure that you are fully protected.
How do I know what immunizations I’ve had?

Advice from the CDC

Your vaccination record (sometimes called your immunization record) provides a history of all the vaccines you received as a child and adult. This record may be required for certain jobs, travel abroad, or school registration.

How to Locate Your Vaccination Records

Unfortunately, there is no national organization that maintains vaccination records. The records that exist are the ones you or your parents were given when the vaccines were administered and the ones in the medical record of the doctor or clinic where the vaccines were given.

Talk with your doctor about the best options to make sure you are up-to-date on vaccines. If you need official copies of vaccination records, or if you need to update your personal records, there are several places you can look:

- Ask parents or other caregivers if they have records of your childhood immunizations.
- Try looking through baby books or other saved documents from your childhood.
- Check with your high school and/or college health services for dates of any immunizations. Keep in mind that generally records are kept only for 1–2 years after students leave the system.
- Check with previous employers (including the military) that may have required immunizations.
- Check with your doctor or public health clinic. Keep in mind that vaccination records are maintained at doctor’s office for a limited number of years.
- Contact your state’s health department. Some states have registries (Immunization Information Systems) that include adult vaccines.

What To Do If You Can't Find Your Records

If you can’t find your records, you may need to get some of the vaccines again. It’s not ideal, but it is safe to repeat vaccines. A doctor can also do blood tests to see if you’re immune to certain vaccine-preventable diseases.

Tools to Record Your Vaccinations

Today we move, travel, and change healthcare providers a lot. Finding old immunization information can be difficult and time-consuming. Therefore, it is critical that you keep an accurate and up-to-date record of the vaccinations you have received. Keeping an immunization record and storing it with other important documents will save you time and unnecessary hassle.

Ask your doctor, pharmacist or other vaccine provider for an immunization record form or download and use this form. Bring this record with you to health visits, and ask your vaccine provider to sign and date the form for each vaccine you receive.

If your vaccine provider participates in an immunization registry, ask that your vaccines be documented there as well. If you don’t have a record of your immunization history, start one.

YOUR CHOICE!

take control of your health
When should I get them?
You should get all recommended immunizations as soon as you can. Take charge of your body! Why get sick if you don’t have to?

Are they required?
Some schools and workplaces require certain vaccines. Check [here](#) for university and high school requirements by state.

Where do I get them?
Call your healthcare provider and ask if they give immunizations. If they don’t, ask them to tell you what you should be immunized against, and then check out the public health clinics, pharmacies, or your school clinic.

Who says I need immunizations?
If you’re an older teen or young adult, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the American Medical Association (AMA), the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP), Parents of Kids with Infectious Diseases (PKIDS), Families Fighting Flu (FFF), National Meningitis Association (NMA), American College Health Association (ACHA), American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), American College of Physicians-American Society of Internal Medicine (ACP-ASIM), American Nurses Association (ANA), and, well, about one hundred other major organizations and thousands of smaller groups all say you need to be fully immunized. Check with your provider to see which immunizations you need.

Why do I need to be immunized?
Most people your age don’t immediately think of immunizations as something they need to stay healthy. But teens and 20-somethings often get hepatitis A or B, mumps, chickenpox, HPV, and other vaccine-preventable infections.

These diseases, which are so easy to prevent, can cause your body a lot of harm. The CDC explains how:

**Hepatitis A** is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis A virus (HAV). HAV is found in the poop of people infected with hepatitis A.

Hepatitis A can cause:
- "flu-like" illness
- jaundice (yellow skin or eyes, dark urine)
- severe stomach pains and diarrhea (children)

People with hepatitis A often have to be hospitalized (up to about 1 person in 5). Adults with hepatitis A are often too ill to work for up to a month. Sometimes, people die as a result of hepatitis A (about 3-6 deaths per 1,000 cases).
**Hepatitis B** is a serious infection that affects the liver. It is caused by the hepatitis B virus.

- In 2009, about 38,000 people became infected with hepatitis B.
- Each year about 2,000 to 4,000 people die in the United States from hepatitis B.

Hepatitis B can cause:

**Acute (short-term) illness.** This can lead to:

- loss of appetite
- tiredness
- pain in muscles, joints, and stomach
- diarrhea and vomiting
- jaundice (yellow skin or eyes)

**Chronic (long-term) infection.** This can lead to:

- liver damage (cirrhosis)
- liver cancer
- death

Up to 1.4 million people in the United States may have chronic hepatitis B infection. Hepatitis B virus is easily spread through contact with the blood or other body fluids of an infected person.

**Tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis** can be very serious 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 a thick coating to form in the back of the throat.

- It can lead to breathing problems, paralysis, heart failure, and death.

**Pertussis** (Whooping Cough) causes severe coughing spells, which can cause difficulty breathing, vomiting and disturbed sleep.

- It can also lead to weight loss, incontinence, and rib fractures.
- Up to 2 in 100 adolescents and 5 in 100 adults with pertussis are hospitalized or have complications, which could include pneumonia or death.

Diphtheria and pertussis are spread from person to person through coughing or sneezing. Tetanus enters the body through cuts, scratches, or wounds.

Before vaccines, the United States saw as many as 200,000 cases a year of diphtheria and pertussis, and hundreds of cases of tetanus. Since vaccination began, tetanus and diphtheria have dropped by about 99% and pertussis by about 80%.
Human papillomavirus (HPV) is the most common sexually transmitted virus in the United States.

- More than half of sexually active men and women are infected with HPV at some time in their lives.
- About 20 million Americans are currently infected, and about 6 million more get infected each year. HPV is usually spread through sexual contact.
- HPV can cause cervical cancer in women. Cervical cancer is the 2nd leading cause of cancer deaths among women around the world. In the United States, about 10,000 women get cervical cancer every year and about 4,000 are expected to die from it.
- HPV is also associated with several less common cancers, such as vaginal and vulvar cancers in women and other types of cancer in both men and women. It can also cause genital warts and warts in the throat.

Influenza (flu) is a contagious disease that spreads around the United States every winter, usually between October and May.

Flu can be spread by coughing, sneezing, and close contact.

Anyone can get flu, but the risk of getting flu is highest among children [although certain strains can be more harmful to healthy young adults].

Symptoms come on suddenly and may last several days. They can include:

- fever/chills
- sore throat
- muscle aches
- fatigue
- cough
- headache
- runny or stuffy nose

Flu can also lead to pneumonia, and make existing medical conditions worse.

Each year thousands of people in the United States die from flu, and many more are hospitalized.
Measles, mumps, and rubella are serious diseases.

Measles
- Measles virus causes rash, cough, runny nose, eye irritation, and fever.
- It can lead to ear infection, pneumonia, seizures (jerking and staring), brain damage, and death.

Mumps
- Mumps virus causes fever, headache, muscle pain, loss of appetite, and swollen glands.
- It can lead to deafness, meningitis (infection of the brain and spinal cord covering), painful swelling of the testicles or ovaries, and rarely, sterility.

Rubella (German Measles)
- Rubella virus causes rash, arthritis (mostly in women), and mild fever.
- If a woman gets rubella while she is pregnant, she could have a miscarriage or her baby could be born with serious birth defects.

These diseases spread from person to person through the air. You can easily catch them by being around someone who is already infected.

Measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccine can protect children and adults from all three of these diseases.

Polio is a disease caused by a virus.
- It enters the body through the mouth. Usually it does not cause serious illness.
- Sometimes it causes paralysis (can't move arm or leg), and it can cause meningitis (irritation of the lining of the brain).
- It can kill people who get it, usually by paralyzing the muscles that help them breathe.

Polio used to be very common in the United States. It paralyzed and killed thousands of people a year before we had a vaccine.

We continue to vaccinate because any disease in the world is but a plane ride away.
**Chickenpox (varicella)** is usually mild, but it can be serious, especially in young infants and adults.

- It causes a rash, itching, fever, and tiredness.
- It can lead to severe skin infection, scars, pneumonia, brain damage, or death.
- The chickenpox virus can be spread from person to person through the air, or by contact with fluid from chickenpox blisters.
- A person who has had chickenpox can get a painful rash called shingles years later.
- Before the vaccine, about 11,000 people were hospitalized for chickenpox each year in the United States.
- Before the vaccine, about 100 people died each year as a result of chickenpox in the United States.

Most people who get chickenpox vaccine will not get chickenpox. But if someone who has been vaccinated does get chickenpox, it is usually very mild. They will have fewer blisters, are less likely to have a fever, and will recover faster.

**Meningococcal** disease is a serious bacterial illness. It is a leading cause of bacterial meningitis in children 2 through 18 years old in the United States.

- Meningitis is an infection of the covering of the brain and the spinal cord.
- Meningococcal disease also causes blood infections.
- About 1,000 – 1,200 people get meningococcal disease each year in the U.S.
- Even when they are treated with antibiotics, 10-15% of these people die. Of those who live, another 11%-19% lose their arms or legs, have problems with their nervous systems, become deaf or intellectually disabled, or suffer seizures or strokes.
- Anyone can get meningococcal disease. But it is most common in infants less than one year of age and people 16-21 years.
- Children with certain medical conditions, such as lack of a spleen, have an increased risk of getting meningococcal disease.
- College freshmen living in dorms are also at increased risk.