

DOCTOR DISCUSSION GUIDE

Understanding Adult Vaccines

Childhood vaccines might get a lot of the buzz, but adults need them, too. Keeping up to date on recommended vaccinations during adulthood is an important step to protecting your health and the health of those around you. Prepare to talk about vaccines during your next doctor's visit by brushing up on some common terms and questions.

Vocabulary to Know

Your doctor might mention these common terms. Here's what they mean.

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| Immunity | Your body's ability to protect itself against a particular organism and avoid getting sick with the same disease in the future. Often, immunity is the result of either being vaccinated or getting sick with a wild infection. |
| Antigen | A germ or some other foreign substance that jump-starts the immune system. Vaccines work by exposing the body to small amounts of weakened antigens, prompting the immune system to make antibodies to defend itself. |
| Antibody | A protein made by the body to target specific antigens so that they can be destroyed. Afterwards, the antibodies remain to protect against future infections. |
| Live Vaccines | Some vaccines are made using live—but weakened—versions of viruses, which are much safer than wild viruses and don't cause illness in healthy individuals. However, pregnant women and those with weakened immune systems should not receive live vaccines because there is a risk the vaccine viruses might make them sick. |
| Adverse Event | Unwanted reactions, side effects, or events following vaccination that may or may not be the result of the vaccine. |
| Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS) | A tool for reporting any adverse event following vaccination—even those that might not have been caused by the vaccine. Health officials follow-up on VAERS reports to identify and study potential vaccine side effects or risks. Reports to VAERS should not be confused for proof that vaccines cause a particular medical issue. |
| Thimerosal | A preservative that protects multi-dose vials of vaccines from contamination between doses. While research shows thimerosal to be very safe, it was removed from nearly all vaccines in the early 2000s. It's now only found in select tetanus and flu vaccines, for which thimerosal-free formulations are also available. |
| Contraindication | A circumstance or medical condition—such as pregnancy, an allergy, or a weakened immune system—when a vaccine should not be given because of an increased risk of side effects or reactions. |
| Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) | The panel of public health and medical experts responsible for making the childhood and adult vaccination schedules in the U.S. Panel members meet often to discuss the latest research regarding vaccines and diseases, and draft guidelines for medical professionals on who should (and should not) be vaccinated and when. |



Questions to Ask

These questions will help you start a conversation with your doctor about vaccination.

About the Benefits of Vaccination

- What vaccines should I get today?
- I was vaccinated against certain diseases as a child. Do I need to be re-vaccinated against them now?
- I'm relatively healthy and don't get sick often. Why is it important for me to get vaccinated against diseases?
- How do you decide what vaccines to recommend? Why does it seem to change from year to year?

About Vaccine Safety

- What side effects can I expect after this vaccine?
- How do you know vaccines are safe? What kind of testing do they go through before they're approved?
- What can you tell me about the different chemicals and ingredients in vaccines? Why are they used, and how do you know they are safe?
- Will any of these vaccines interfere my medications?
- Are there any particular vaccines I should or shouldn't receive because of my health or medical history?

About Vaccination in the Community

- How will my decision to get vaccinated (or not) affect my family or community?
- I have a close family member receiving cancer treatment. Is it safe for me to be around them if I've just been vaccinated?
- Should I be worried about recent measles and whooping cough outbreaks? Why or why not?
- What do I say to friends and family members who don't support vaccination?

About Follow-Up After Vaccination

- When do I need to come back for follow-up doses or booster shots?
- If I have more questions or concerns about vaccines, where should I go for more information?
