



# Vaccines for Adults

## **Influenza Vaccine**

Influenza is a very dangerous virus that infects and kills 30,000 to 40,000 people each year. This virus causes severe cough, sore throat, fever and body aches. Since it is caused by a virus, influenza can't be treated with antibiotics. It is different from the "stomach flu", and typically doesn't cause stomach upset or diarrhea. The virus mutates every year, and scientists work hard to track those mutations. Every year these researchers recommend an updated vaccine to protect us against the predicted common strains. The vaccine contains killed segment of the influenza virus and **will not** make you sick or give you the flu. Because this vaccine is given in the fall when many people develop fall colds, it is often erroneously blamed for causing people to become ill. With very few exceptions, we recommend that all patients be immunized every fall.

## **Diphtheria, Tetanus and Pertussis Vaccine**

Outbreaks of Pertussis or "whooping cough" are unfortunately seen every year in Utah County. Each year many children and some adults die from this preventable disease. Children and adolescents are immunized against this disease as part of their routine immunizations. In the past, we have not emphasized vaccination of adults but this has changed as we attempt to decrease the yearly outbreaks of this deadly disease. The booster vaccine for adults is sometimes referred to as the "Tdap". Adults who have not previously received a Tdap shot should get one, particularly if they will be exposed to infants under 1 year of age. Parents, grandparents, childcare providers, and healthcare providers all should be immunized or re-immunized. All pregnant mothers should be immunized in the last trimester as they will transfer immunity to their newborn babies. Because some studies show immunity to pertussis begins to drop after 2-4 years, most authorities recommend another booster dose after 10 years.

## **Pneumococcal Vaccines**

This vaccine has been mistakenly called "the pneumonia shot." It actually protects against one specific type of bacteria, called the pneumococcus. This bacteria can cause ear infections in children and adults as well as life threatening illnesses like pneumonia and meningitis. Children receive vaccinations to protect them against pneumococcal disease as part of their childhood immunizations. There are now two different vaccines to protect adults against pneumococcal disease, given 6-12 months apart. We give them to patients 65 and older as well as some younger patients who have chronic health problems or who may be at high risk for infection. These are NOT yearly vaccines, and most patients just need to have one dose of each vaccine.

## **Shingles Vaccine**

The varicella zoster virus is the same virus that causes chicken pox. After a person has chicken pox, this virus can survive in "hibernation" in our body's nerve cells. Years later, it can re-activate and cause a disease we call "shingles." Because shingles affects the nerves, it causes pain, tingling, burning or itching. Often there is a blistering rash over the affected nerve. In older people, the nerve pain can become permanent and disabling. Sometimes the skin rash can lead to dangerous skin infections. If the infection involves the face, it can infect the eye and cause blindness. Most insurance companies will pay for the shingles vaccine if you are over 60. This vaccine makes it much less likely that you will develop shingles, and if you do it reduces your risk of permanent nerve damage. Currently Medicare will not pay for this vaccine, so we recommend that patients receive the vaccine between age 60 and 65. We do recommend this for Medicare patients as well, but recommend they obtain the vaccine at a pharmacy or the health department to minimize their out-of-pocket cost.