Public Health Division

Adult dose of tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis (Tdap) vaccine: information for adults & caregivers

This fact sheet provides basic information for the public. It is not intended to provide or take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always talk to a health care professional about any health concerns you may have, before you make any changes to your current diet, lifestyle or treatment.

Updates:

Effective December 2014, Ontario has expanded its publicly funded adult pertussis (whooping cough) immunization program to include individuals aged 65 years and older, regardless of whether they received a pertussis-containing vaccine in adolescence.

What is pertussis (whooping cough)?

Pertussis is a common disease that causes prolonged cough illness. This cough may have a whooping sound, and can cause a person to vomit or stop breathing for a short period of time. The cough can last for weeks and makes it hard to eat, drink or even breathe. It can affect people at any age, but pertussis is particularly serious in infants. Pertussis can cause serious complications such as pneumonia, brain damage and seizures, especially in babies.

Pertussis spreads very easily from an infected person to others through coughing or sneezing. Caregivers have been increasingly recognized as a key source for pertussis infection in infants and young children. Infected adults and adolescents can pass on the disease to infants who have not yet begun or completed their immunization series against pertussis. These infants will not be fully protected against pertussis and are at greater risk of serious complications.

What is tetanus (lock jaw)?

Tetanus is a serious disease that may occur if dirt with the tetanus germ gets into a cut in the skin. Tetanus germs are found everywhere, usually in soil, dust and manure. Tetanus does not spread from person to person. Tetanus causes cramping of the muscles in the neck, arms, legs and stomach. It may also cause painful tightening of the muscles (convulsions) which may be severe enough to break bones. Even with early treatment, tetanus kills two out of every 10 people who get it.

What is diphtheria?

Diphtheria is a serious disease of the nose, throat and skin. It causes sore throat, fever and chills. It may also cause more serious complications such as breathing problems, heart failure and nerve damage.

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Ontario

Diphtheria kills about one out of every 10 people who get the disease. It is most often passed to others through coughing and sneezing. As a result of high vaccination rates, there have been no cases of diphtheria in Ontario since 1995.

Who is eligible to receive the publicly funded vaccine?

There are a number of vaccines available in Canada which protect against pertussis, tetanus and diphtheria. For instance, in Ontario, a combination vaccine protecting against diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, polio and *Haemophilus influenzae* type b is publicly funded in infancy, and Tdap vaccine (protecting against tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis) is publicly funded in adolescence and adulthood. People require multiple boosters throughout their lifespan due to waning immunity over time. The primary focus of this fact sheet is on the Tdap vaccine offered in adolescence and adulthood.

Routine Adolescent Tdap Immunization Program

In Ontario, adolescents 14 to 16 years of age are eligible to receive the publicly funded Tdap vaccine, and eligibility continues until 18 years of age. Starting in the 2014/15 school year, students need to have proof of immunization with Tdap in adolescence, or a valid exemption, to attend school in Ontario.

Routine Adult Tdap Immunization Program

In 2011, the adolescent Tdap immunization program was expanded to include a single life-time dose of Tdap vaccine for adults 19 to 65 years of age who did not receive a Tdap dose in adolescence. Effective December 2014, all adults 19 years of age and older, including those 65 years of age and older, are now eligible to receive a single publicly funded dose of the vaccine, irrespective of receiving a prior dose of Tdap in adolescence. This adult dose of pertussis-containing vaccine replaces one of the Td booster doses, which is given every 10 years.

Parents, grandparents or other adult household contacts of newborns, infants and young children, as well as health care workers, are considered priority groups for receiving the Tdap vaccine.

Who should not get the Tdap vaccine?

Individuals with a history of anaphylaxis after a previous dose of a vaccine containing diphtheria, tetanus or pertussis, and individuals with proven immediate or anaphylactic hypersensitivity to any component of the vaccine or its container, should not receive the Tdap vaccine.

Who should consult their health care provider when considering the vaccine?

Individuals who have:

- history of an allergic reaction to any component and/or ingredient of the vaccine;
- history of a severe injection site reaction following a dose of tetanus toxoid-containing vaccine;
- weakened immune system;
- bleeding disorder or are taking blood-thinning medication;
- history of problems with the brain or nerves after previous vaccination with a vaccine against diphtheria and/or tetanus;

- history of encephalopathy of undetermined cause within seven days of administration of a vaccine with pertussis components;
- history of progressive or unstable neurological conditions (e.g., uncontrolled epilepsy); or
- a severe infection with a fever higher than 40°C (administration of Tdap should be postponed; vaccination can occur if the individual has a minor infection).

Special consideration is also needed for persons who:

- have a history of Guillian-Barré syndrome (GBS) within 6 weeks of a previous tetanus vaccine dose (those who develop GBS outside the 6 week interval may be immunized);
- are pregnant (all pregnant women following 26 weeks of pregnancy who have not received a dose of a pertussis containing vaccine in adulthood should be encouraged to receive Tdap vaccination).

Is the Tdap vaccine safe and effective?

Yes, the Tdap vaccine is very safe and effective. Vaccine safety is a priority for the ministry. All publicly funded vaccines are tested to make sure they are both safe and effective. Vaccine safety is continually monitored by public health.

Most individuals will have no side effects from the Tdap vaccine; however, if they do occur, they tend to be mild and last for only a few days after getting the vaccine. The most common side effect is pain at the injection site. Other side effects may include pain, redness and swelling at the injection site, headache, fatigue, fever and/or chills. Allergic and other severe reactions are very rare.

Please report any side effects or severe vaccine reactions to your health care provider or local public health unit. You should always discuss the benefits and risks of any vaccine with your health care provider.

When should I call my health care provider?

Call your health care provider or go to the nearest emergency department if any of the following symptoms develop within three days of receiving the vaccine:

- hives;
- swelling of the face or mouth;
- trouble breathing;
- very pale colour and serious drowsiness;
- high fever (over 40°C);
- convulsions or seizures; or
- other serious symptoms (e.g., paraesthesia).

Who should I talk to if I have any more questions about the Tdap vaccine?

Talk to your health care provider or call your local public health unit for more information.

Your record of protection

After receiving a vaccine, make sure your personal immunization record (i.e., the "Yellow Card") is updated. Keep it in a safe place!

For More Information

Further information is available at:

- Your public health unit: www.phdapps.health.gov.on.ca/PHULocator.
- Immunization information is available at: www.ontario.ca/vaccines.