

# Vaccines for Teens and Preteens:

## Answers to Your Top Questions



**This fact sheet has been reviewed by pediatricians and infectious disease experts. Use it to help you protect your child's health.**

### 1. What shots does my child need?

- Tdap vaccine protects against 3 diseases: tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis (“whooping cough”)
- Meningococcal meningitis vaccine
- HPV (Human Papillomavirus) vaccine though HPV vaccine can be given starting at age 9
- Flu vaccine each year
- Catch-up booster shots: your child may be behind on a 2nd dose of chickenpox vaccine or MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella) vaccine.
- Covid-19 vaccine

### 2. At what age should my child be vaccinated?

These shots are usually given at ages 11-12 years, though HPV vaccine can be given as early as 9 years. Teens also need a meningococcal booster shot at 16. The whole family needs flu vaccine every year.

### 3. Why at these ages?

Doctors recommend shots to protect preteens and teens against diseases they may face sooner or later. Getting shots now will protect them for many years to come. In some cases, booster shots are needed because protection from earlier shots fades over time.

### 4. Is it okay to get multiple shots in one visit?

Yes. Your child's healthy immune system can handle several shots with no problem. The National Academy of Medicine has reviewed all solid scientific studies and agrees that getting several *shots in one visit is safe at any age*. Getting multiple shots in one visit may also be more convenient for you.

### 5. Can all shots be taken care of at one visit?

Yes. Your child can get all recommended shots in one visit. However, it takes at least 6 months to complete the HPV shot series. You'll have to schedule follow-up shot visit(s) to finish the HPV series. The meningococcal booster shot will come later at age 16.

### 6. My child is nervous about shots. What can I do to help?

It's normal to get a little nervous. Suggest deep breaths or listening to music to help relax. Offer praise and encouragement during and after the appointment.

### 7. What kind of side effects might I see?

The most common side effects are redness, swelling and a sore arm where the shot was given. If your child plays sports, you might not want to schedule a shot visit right before a game.

Teens faint more easily after shots or stressful events. To help protect them, it's a good idea to sit or lie down for 15 minutes after getting shots.

*See next page for safety facts about vaccines and the diseases they prevent.*



# Vaccines for Teens and Preteens:

## Vaccine Safety Facts and the Diseases they Prevent

**Whooping Cough** (pertussis) can make kids cough so hard that they throw up or break their ribs. Coughing can last for months.

**Tdap vaccine** protects against whooping cough (plus tetanus and diphtheria). The most common side effects include pain and redness where the shot was given. A severe allergy happens less than one time in a million shots given.



"Sometimes at the end of our coughing fits we couldn't get any air and ended up throwing up."  
—Emily, whooping cough survivor.

**Flu** can send even healthy kids to the hospital. Usually, more than 100 children die every year from flu in the U.S.

**Flu vaccine** is needed every year. Flu vaccine can greatly lower the chances of ending up at the hospital or dying from flu. Anyone with certain allergies (e.g., eggs, latex) should check with the doctor before getting vaccinated. Flu vaccines are very safe. The risk of a severe allergic reaction is less than one in a million.



"They were sure I was a goner. My mom couldn't handle it so she ran into a small conference room...to plead to God for my life."  
—Luke, flu survivor

**Meningococcal meningitis** is spread by coughing, kissing, or sharing drinks. It can cause fatal infections or brain damage. Amputations may be needed to save a patient's life.

**Meningococcal vaccine** is very effective in preventing the disease. Common side effects include redness or pain where the shot was given. Less often, some people get a fever. Serious allergic reactions are very rare.



"It was 13 hours from the time she experienced a sore throat to the time she was pronounced dead... It was 8 days before her 16th birthday."  
—MaryJo, died of meningococcal meningitis

**COVID-19** is an illness that can easily spread and targets the sinuses and lungs. While most people who catch it have mild illness, it can be serious, even in kids.

**COVID-19 vaccine** can prevent serious illness and hospitalization. Over 250 million people, including nearly 30 million children, have safely received the COVID-19 vaccine in the US. Most side effects, such as pain at the injection site, tiredness, or fever, are mild and last a couple of days.



"I was a varsity soccer player in high school, and now I get winded just from walking."  
—Katelyn, still suffers from symptoms of COVID-19

**HPV infection** affects most unvaccinated Americans in their lifetime and can lead to cervical cancer, as well as some cancers of the throat, vagina, penis, and anus.

**HPV vaccine** safety monitoring has been in place since 2006. The US and other countries have given hundreds of millions of vaccinations. The most common side effect is pain at the injection site. Serious side effects are very rare and can include headaches, dizziness or nausea.



"If I could save one child from going through my pain, then I feel like my job is done."  
—Heather, died of cervical cancer.

**Chickenpox** is more than just an itchy rash. The disease can be severe in older children and adults. While many cases are milder, the "pox" sores can get infected. Before the vaccine, over 10,000 Americans would end up in the hospital and 100 would die every year from chickenpox.

**Chickenpox (varicella) vaccine** is very safe. The most common side effects are mild: a rash, fever, or redness and pain where the shot was given. Serious side effects are very rare—only a few instances have ever been seen in over 20 years of use.



"We want to warn other parents that while chickenpox is often a mild disease, you can't count on it. Complications can happen. Yes, it can even kill."  
—Jesse, died of chickenpox

### Looking for more information?

When it comes to health decisions for your children, you want reliable information. Be a truth-seeker and ask your doctor. Or, look for trusted sources on pre-teen and teen vaccines—like these:

**Possible Side Effects from Vaccines**  
**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**  
[cdc.gov/vaccines/vac-gen/side-effects.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vac-gen/side-effects.htm)

**American Cancer Society**  
[www.cancer.org](https://www.cancer.org)

**Vaccine Education Center**  
**Children's Hospital of Philadelphia**  
[www.chop.edu/vaccines](https://www.chop.edu/vaccines)

**Vaccines at 11 to 12 Years**  
**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**  
<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents/by-age/years-11-12.html>