

# why do adults need immunization?

**Tetanus & Diphtheria:** Tetanus (lockjaw) is caused by a bacterium that lives in soil. It causes painful tightening and damage to muscles, and death in about 3 out of 10 cases. Immunity is not lifelong so vaccination is recommended every 10 years. No "herd immunity" so every individual needs protection. Diphtheria is a contagious disease that causes a thick coating at the back of the throat, and can lead to breathing problems, heart failure and nerve damage. Vaccination has greatly decreased this disease but immunization is necessary to keep it controlled.

**Pertussis (whooping cough):** Pertussis is an infection of the respiratory tract causing a persistent cough and respiratory problems. Adults with the disease can infect others such as babies who are too young to be fully immunized. Whooping cough can be a lifethreatening illness for young infants. Immunity is not lifelong so booster vaccination is recommended for adults.

**Hepatitis B:** Hepatitis B virus infects the liver. It is spread through exposure to infected blood or other bodily fluids including semen. Immunity through immunization is lifelong. Adults are encouraged to be immunized if they are at high risk of exposure including:

- Health care workers
- People with multiple sexual partners
- Users of street drugs.

**Hepatitis A:** Hepatitis A virus infects the liver. It is spread by contaminated hands, food and water. People who should consider this vaccine include:

- Residents of communities lacking good sanitation or clean drinking water
- Residents of institutions which have a high risk of hepatitis A outbreaks, such as correctional facilities and those for developmentally challenged people
- Men who have sex with men
- Users of street drugs.

**Influenza:** Influenza (flu) is a serious respiratory disease. Adults should receive influenza vaccine in the fall each year, especially those 65 years of age and over, those under 65 years of age who have underlying medical conditions, and those with household contact with children under 2 years of age. Anyone who wants to reduce their chance of catching the flu, or of passing it on to others, can benefit from the vaccine.

**Measles, Mumps & Rubella:** The measles virus is very contagious. It usually causes a rash and fever but can also lead to pneumonia or a serious brain infection (encephalitis).

Mumps is a major cause of viral meningitis (infection in the spinal cord or covering of the brain). Mumps can also cause deafness or sterility and infection during the first trimester of pregnancy may increase the risk of miscarriage. Rubella is rarely a serious disease for adults but it causes birth defects if a woman gets rubella in early pregnancy. Any adult who has not already had the MMR vaccine or any of these three diseases can be tested to see if they are immune, and if not, should consider vaccination. A booster may be needed in some cases.

**Varicella (chickenpox):** When adults get chickenpox, complications are more common and often more serious, compared to the disease in childhood. Any adult who has not already had chickenpox or the vaccine can be tested to see if they are immune, and if not, should consider vaccination, especially:

- Women of child-bearing age. Chickenpox during pregnancy can pose a risk to the mother and baby. Varicella vaccine should not be given during pregnancy.
- People who live with someone with a damaged or depressed immune system
- Day care workers and teachers of young children
- Health care workers
- New immigrants from tropical climates where chickenpox is much less common than in Canada.

**Pneumococcal disease:** This is a group of bacteria that infect the lungs (pneumonia), the blood (bacteremia), and the covering of the brain (meningitis). Antibiotic resistance has made treatment more difficult so vaccination is important to prevent this disease. All adults over 65 and anyone with a medical condition that increases their risk of serious infection should be immunized. A booster may be needed in some cases.

**Meningococcal disease:** This is a group of infections that includes meningitis (infection of the membranes and fluid that cover the brain and spinal cord), bacteremia (infection of the bloodstream) and septicemia (severe bacteremia). There are several strains of bacteria that cause meningococcal disease. Vaccines are currently available for four strains. Immunization is recommended for people with specific medical conditions and people who live in residential accommodation including students and military personnel. A booster may be needed in some cases.

**Travelling to another country?** Consult a travel health clinic, your doctor, local public health office, or [www.travelhealth.gc.ca](http://www.travelhealth.gc.ca)

Ask your doctor, public health office or pharmacist for more information, or visit our web site below.

## Immunization. It's not just for kids!

Canadian Coalition for  
Immunization Awareness & Promotion  
[www.immunize.cpha.ca](http://www.immunize.cpha.ca)

