

Preteens Need Additional Immunizations

Preteens (11 and 12 year olds) need additional immunizations. These vaccines protect against serious diseases including whooping cough, meningococcal meningitis and cervical cancer, as well as extend the protection of infant and childhood vaccines. Preteens may also need to catch-up on immunizations that may have been missed. Most of the newer preteen immunizations are not covered under the California School Immunization Law, so are not required for school entry. However, it is very important that preteens be protected against these potentially very serious diseases. Let's look at the immunizations preteens need.

Meningococcal Conjugate Vaccine (MCV4). Only one shot is needed to protect against this devastating disease. Meningococcal disease is caused by bacteria that can infect the blood or areas around the brain and spinal cord. Although the disease is rare, it can lead to brain damage, disability, and rapid death. MCV4 protects against four of the five most common groups of bacteria that cause meningococcal disease. Older adolescents and college freshmen that will live in dorms should also get this vaccine if they missed getting it as preteens. For additional information see: www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/vis/downloads/vis-mening.pdf.

Tetanus-Diphtheria-Pertussis Vaccine (Tdap). The Tdap vaccine is recommended as a one time single booster dose for preteens and for adolescents who missed it as preteens to protect against tetanus, diphtheria, and whooping cough (pertussis). The protection received from immunization as an infant wanes over time. The whooping cough component in the vaccine is important, as nearly one in four cases of whooping cough reported in California in 2005 was among 10 to 19 year olds. Whooping cough can cause severe coughing that leads to vomiting and sometimes the cough is so severe it can break ribs. It can cause pneumonia that requires hospitalization and may cause the preteen to miss weeks of school. Whooping cough is especially dangerous for babies who can catch it from a coughing person. After the Tdap immunization, a booster dose of tetanus-diphtheria vaccine (Td) is needed every 10 years. For additional information see: www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/vis/downloads/vis-tdap.pdf.

Human Papillomavirus Vaccine (HPV). Preteen girls need 3 doses of this vaccine given over a six-month period for protection against human papillomavirus, which can cause cervical cancer years after infection with the virus. The vaccine protects against 2 types of human papillomavirus that cause 70% of cervical cancers and the 2 types of human papillomavirus that cause 90% of genital warts. HPV vaccine is also recommended for young women 13 through 26 years of age who have not received the new vaccine. It is still being studied to determine whether boys and young men should also get the vaccine. For additional information see: www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/vis/downloads/vis-hpv.pdf.

Varicella (Chickenpox) Vaccine (VZV). Two doses of varicella vaccine are now recommended for everyone who has not had chickenpox, as diagnosed by a doctor. Two doses provide better protection against chickenpox than one dose. Preteens who have never had the chickenpox and have not yet received two doses should be vaccinated. Chickenpox disease is frequently more severe in adolescents and adults and can lead to severe skin infections, scars, pneumonia, brain damage, or rarely death. For additional information see: www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/vis/downloads/vis-varicella.pdf.

Hepatitis A Vaccine (HAV). Two vaccine doses separated by 6 months have been recommended since 1999 for all children through 18 years of age living in states with increased rates of hepatitis A disease, including California. However many California preteens and adolescents have not received this vaccine. Hepatitis A disease frequently does not cause symptoms in children, but adults can be very ill with jaundice, nausea and vomiting, diarrhea, and about 15% of people infected with hepatitis A virus will have prolonged or relapsing symptoms over a 6-9 month period. Even though children may not always feel sick when they have hepatitis A, they can spread it to other people. For more information see: www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/vis/downloads/vis-hep-a.pdf

Hepatitis B Vaccine (HBV). Three doses of hepatitis B vaccine spread over 6 months are needed. Many preteens have had this vaccine as it has been routinely recommended for infants since 1991. However, if it was missed, it should be received now, as it is required for 7th grade entry under the California School Immunization Law. Hepatitis B is a serious disease caused by a virus that attacks the liver. The hepatitis B virus can cause lifelong infection, cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver, liver cancer, liver failure, and death. For additional information see: www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/vis/downloads/vis-hep-b.pdf.

Influenza Vaccine (Flu). Preteens and adolescents should receive a flu vaccine every year in the fall. Flu vaccines are routinely recommended for all children 6 months of age through 18 years of age and are especially important for preteens with health conditions such as asthma or diabetes, that increase their risk for influenza complications. It is also important that preteens and adolescents who live in households with persons at increased risk for flu complications, such as the elderly or infants, receive a yearly influenza immunization. Complications of flu can include bacterial pneumonia, ear infections, sinus infections, dehydration, and worsening of chronic medical conditions such as congestive heart failure, asthma, or diabetes. For additional information see: www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/vis/downloads/vis-flu.pdf and www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/vis/downloads/vis-flulive.pdf.

Preteen health care visits at age 11 to 12 years are key to a healthy start for adolescents. In addition to getting needed immunizations, it is the perfect time for parents and preteens to talk to the doctor about ways for the preteen to stay healthy, including eating right, being active, and standing up to peer pressure.