Keeping Up-to-Date With Your Vaccines: Why It's Important

Vaccines have saved more lives than almost any other public health initiative in history. In Canada, vaccines have helped to stop the spread of diseases like polio and hepatitis B. Most people get vaccinated as babies and then, other than the annual flu vaccine, very few routine vaccines are recommended after puberty. This is because the vaccines we get as babies either offer lifelong protection or, at the very least, ensure that we're strongly protected against infection at ages when we're at highest risk of getting an infection and/or complications from a vaccine preventable disease. For example, babies and toddlers are much more likely to get seriously sick from whooping cough than healthy young adults. This is why it's so important for people to start getting vaccines when they're just a few months old!

Even if adults don't need many routine vaccines, it is still important for people of all ages to know which vaccine preventable diseases they have protection against and which vaccines may be recommended as you get older. Take a look through our "FAQs" in the next section to help make sense of your vaccine history, no matter how old you are! You can also consult the resources from the BC Center for Disease Control for more information.

		Adults 18 to 49 years old	Adults 50 to 59 years old	Adults 65+ years old
Influenza	**Free**	• Medical, occupational high risk • Capable of spreading the flu to those at high risk		All adults 65+
	Cost	Adults who want protection		
Tetanus, Diptheria	**Free**	Every 10 years		
Pertussis	**Free**	• No prior doses • Unknown immunization history • Medically high risk		
	Cost	1 dose after the age of 18		
Hepatitis B	**Free**	• Medical, occupational or lifestyle risk • Born after 1980		
	Cost	• Living in communities with higher risk • Want protection		
Chicken Pox	**Free**	No history of chicken pox disease		
Measles, Mumps, Rubella	**Free**	Born in 1970 or later with no history of the disease		
Meningococcal Conjugate C	**Free**	Born in 1988 or later		
	Cost	Adults who want protection		
Meningococcal Quadrivalent Conjugate	**Free**	Medically high risk		
	Cost	• Occupational risk • Want protection		
Pneumococcal Conjugate	**Free**	Some adults who are medically high risk		
	Cost	• Medically high risk • Adults 50+		
Pneumococcal Polysaccharide	**Free**	• Medical or lifestyle risks • Living in residential care facilities		All adults 65+
	Cost	• Adults who want protection • Smokers		
Shingles	**Cost**		• Available 50-59 years old • Recommended 60+ years old	
Hepatitis A	**Free**	Medical or lifestyle risks		
	Cost	• Occupational or lifestyle risks (including food handlers) • Adults who want protection		
HPV Vaccine	**Free**	Girls born in 1994 and after		
	Cost	• Women 45yrs and younger • Men 26yrs and younger		

For more information please visit [BCCDC - Recommended Vaccines for Adults]

Frequently Asked Questions

I'm an adult and have no idea what vaccines I got as a baby. Should I be getting more vaccines?

Depending on where and when you were born, different vaccines may have been available when you were a baby. Ideally, you can contact public health or your family doctor to request a copy of your immunization records. If this is not possible and you're quite sure you did not get routine vaccines as a baby, you can work with a doctor or nurse to develop an immunization plan to ensure you get the vaccines you need so your protection is up-to-date. For example, even as adults, people who need them can get vaccines to protect against diseases like Hepatitis B and whooping cough.

Where can I find out which vaccines I've received in the past?

Vaccine records may be available in a few different places. Local public health units often keep track of vaccine records for people who were vaccinated in school as children. For people who have a long-term family doctor, the doctor may have a record of past vaccines. As a first step in tracking down vaccine records, you can always call the public health department in the community where you grew up or call your family doctor to request a copy of your immunization record.

Are there certain vaccines that people should get based on their age, where they work, …etc?

Vaccines play a really important role in protecting everyone's health. Depending on factors like how old someone is or where they work, it can be extra important to get certain vaccines. For example, most health care workers have to show they have protection against Hepatitis B before starting their training. This is because Hepatitis B is spread through blood and body fluids. There are also age-specific vaccine recommendations. For example, the shingles vaccine is recommended (but not provided for free in British Columbia) for people 50 years and older. Specific questions about your vaccine needs can be answered by a local physician or public health nurse.

How to Critically Assess Trustworthiness of Vaccine Info

Have you ever seen a story on the news or on Facebook that says vaccines can be dangerous? Sometimes, these stories can be pretty scary. It's always important to ask though (no matter what the story is about!): Is this believable? Sometimes news stories teach us important, new information. Other times, though, news stories can be misleading. There are a lot of different reasons why 'bad' news stories get out – the most important thing to remember though is that not everything we read is true! There are a few questions you can ask yourself when you read a story to help you decide if it is believable:

- **Who is writing the story?** For example, if the story is about vaccines, is it written by someone who has a lot of training in medicine and science (like a doctor or nurse)? Opinions of celebrities aren't necessarily true: fame doesn't foster wisdom.

- **Where is the story published?** When stories are published on a blog or on someone's private website, it means they can write whatever they want (they could say the sky is green but that wouldn't mean it was true!) It's especially important to be cautious about taking what you read on these sites as 'fact'.

- **Could you discuss the story with your local public health nurse or family doctor?** It can be really hard sometimes to decide if what you read is true or not. Talking about news stories with people who are experts in vaccine research can be really helpful!

Vaccine Evaluation Center

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