

# Tdap Vaccine for Preteens and Teens

Last updated March 2012

## Why does my child need Tdap vaccine?

Babies and little kids get shots called DTaP to protect them from diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis (whooping cough). But as kids get older, the protection from the DTaP shots starts to wear off. This can put your preteen or teen at risk for serious illness. The tetanus-diphtheria-acellular pertussis (Tdap) vaccine is a booster shot that protects your preteen or teen from the same diseases that DTaP shots protect little kids from.

- **Tetanus** is caused by a toxin (poison) made by bacteria found in soil. The bacteria enter the body through cuts or puncture wounds in the skin. Tetanus can cause spasms which are painful muscle cramps, in the jaw muscle (lockjaw) and throughout the body. The spasms can cause breathing problems and paralysis. A preteen or teen with tetanus could spend weeks in the hospital in intensive care. As many as 1 out of 5 people who get tetanus dies.
- **Diphtheria** is not as common as tetanus but can be very dangerous. It spreads from person to person through coughing or sneezing. It causes a thick coating on the back of the nose or throat that can make it hard to breathe or swallow. It can also cause paralysis and heart failure. About 1 out of 10 people who gets diphtheria will die from it.
- **Pertussis (whooping cough)** spreads very easily through coughing and sneezing. It can cause a bad cough that lasts for many weeks, which can make preteens and teens miss lots of school and other activities. Whooping cough can be deadly for babies who are too young to have protection from their own vaccines. Often babies get whooping cough from their older brothers or sisters, like preteens or teens, or other people in the family.

## When should my child be vaccinated?

All preteens should get one Tdap shot when they are 11 or 12 years old. If your teen is 13 years old up through 18 years old who hasn't gotten the shot yet, talk to their doctor about getting it for them right away.

## What else should I know about the vaccine?

The Tdap shot has been studied very carefully and is safe and effective. It is recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the American Academy of Family Physicians, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine.

The Tdap shot can cause mild side effects, like redness and soreness in the arm where the shot was given, headache, fever, or tiredness. Some preteens and teens might faint after getting the Tdap vaccine or any other shot. To help avoid fainting, preteens and teens should sit or lie down when they get a shot and then for about 15 minutes after getting the shot. Serious side effects from reactions to the Tdap shot are rare.

## How can I get help paying for these vaccines?

The Vaccines for Children (VFC) program provides vaccines for children ages 18 years and younger, who are not insured or under-insured, Medicaid-eligible, American Indian or Alaska Native. You can find out more about the VFC program by going online to [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) and typing VFC in the search box.

## Where can I learn more?

Your child's doctor or nurse can give you more information about the Tdap vaccine and the other vaccines your child may need. There is also information on CDC's Vaccines for Preteens and Teens website at [www.cdc.gov/vaccines/teens](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/teens).



U.S. Department of  
Health and Human Services  
Centers for Disease  
Control and Prevention