

# TETANUS, DIPHTHERIA PERTUSSIS (Tdap) VACCINE

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

### 1 Why get vaccinated?

Tdap (Tetanus, Diphtheria, Pertussis) vaccine can protect adolescents against three serious diseases.

Tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis are all caused by bacteria. Diphtheria and pertussis are spread from person to person. Tetanus enters the body through cuts or wounds.

**TETANUS (Lockjaw)** causes painful tightening of the muscles, usually all over the body.

- **It can lead to** “locking” of the jaw so the victim cannot open his mouth or swallow. Tetanus leads to death in up to 2 cases out of 10.

**DIPHTHERIA** causes a thick covering in the back of the throat.

- **It can lead to** breathing problems, paralysis, heart failure, and even death.

**PERTUSSIS (Whooping Cough)** causes coughing spells that can make it hard to eat, drink, or breathe.

- **It can lead to** pneumonia, seizures (jerking and staring spells), brain damage, and death, especially in infants. In 2004 there were more than 25,000 cases of pertussis in the U.S. More than 8,000 of these cases were among adolescents 11-18 years of age. Up to 2 in 10 adolescents with pertussis are hospitalized or have complications.

### 2 Tdap and related vaccines

#### Vaccines for Children Younger than 7 Years

- **DTaP** vaccine is given to children to protect them from these three diseases. But immunity can fade over time, and periodic “booster” doses are needed by adolescents and adults to keep immunity strong. (**DTP** is an older version of DTaP. It is no longer used in the United States.)
- **DT** contains diphtheria and tetanus vaccines. It is used for children younger than 7 who should not get pertussis vaccine.

#### Vaccines for Adolescents and Adults

- **Td** (tetanus and diphtheria) vaccine is used for booster doses for adolescents and adults. It does not contain pertussis vaccine.
- **Tdap** was licensed in 2005. It is the first vaccine for adolescents and adults that protects against all three diseases.

### 3 Who should get Tdap vaccine and when?

Adolescents 11 through 18 years of age should get one booster dose of Tdap. Later booster doses should be given using Td.

- A dose of Tdap is recommended for adolescents who have gotten DTaP or DTP as children but not gotten a dose of Td. The preferred age is 11-12.
- Adolescents who have already gotten a booster dose of Td are encouraged to get a dose of Tdap as well, for protection against pertussis.

Adolescents who did not get all their scheduled doses of DTaP or DTP as children should complete the series using a combination of Td and Tdap.

An adolescent who gets a severe cut or burn might need protection against tetanus infection. Tdap may be used if the person has not had a previous dose. Otherwise, Td is recommended.

Tdap may be given at the same time as other vaccines.

### 4 Some people should not get Tdap vaccine or should wait.

- Anyone who has had a **life-threatening allergic reaction** after a dose of DTP, DTaP, DT, or Td vaccine should not get Tdap.
- Anyone who has a **severe allergy to any component of the vaccine** should not get Tdap. Tell your health-care provider if the person getting the vaccine has any known severe allergies. Talk with your doctor if the person getting the vaccine has a **severe allergy to latex**. Some Tdap vaccine may be given to people with a severe latex allergy, and some should not.
- Anyone who went into a **coma** or had a **long seizure** within 7 days after a dose of DTP or DTaP should not get Tdap, unless a cause other than the vaccine was found.
- Talk to your doctor if the person getting the vaccine:
  - has **epilepsy** or another **nervous system problem**,
  - had **severe swelling or severe pain** after a previous dose of any vaccine containing tetanus, diphtheria or pertussis,

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- has had **Guillain Barré Syndrome** (GBS).

- Tdap may be given during pregnancy.

Anyone who has a **moderate or severe illness** on the day the shot is scheduled should usually wait until they recover before getting the vaccine. Those with a mild illness or low fever can usually be vaccinated.

## 5 What are the risks from Tdap vaccine?

A vaccine, like any medicine, could possibly cause serious problems, such as severe allergic reactions. However, the risk of a vaccine causing serious harm, or death, is extremely small.

A person who gets tetanus, diphtheria or pertussis disease is at much higher risk of severe complications than a person who gets Tdap vaccine.

During clinical trials (testing before the vaccine was licensed) involving about 4,000 adolescents, the following problems were reported:

### Mild Problems

- Pain (about 7 in 10)
- Redness or swelling (about 1 in 5)
- Mild fever (at least 99.5°F) (up to about 1 in 10)
- Headache (about 4 in 10)
- Tiredness (less than 1 in 3)
- Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea (about 1 in 5)
- Other mild problems reported include chills, body aches, sore joints, rash, and swollen lymph nodes.

### Moderate Problems

- Severe pain at the injection site (about 1 in 20)
- Severe redness or swelling (up to about 1 in 16)
- Fever over 102°F (about 1 in 100)

### Severe Problems

- None found among adolescents.
- A severe allergic reaction could occur after any vaccine. These are estimated to occur less than once in a million doses.

In another clinical trial, two adults had nervous system problems after getting the vaccine. They may or may not have been caused by the vaccine.

These problems went away on their own and did not cause any permanent harm.

If rare reactions occur with any new product, they may not be identified until many thousands, or millions, of people have used the product. Like all vaccines, Tdap is being monitored for unusual or severe problems.

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## What if there is a severe reaction?

### What should I look for?

- Any unusual condition, such as a high fever or behavior changes. Signs of a serious allergic reaction can include difficulty breathing, hoarseness or wheezing, hives, paleness, weakness, a fast heart beat or dizziness.

### What should I do?

- **Call** a doctor, or get the person to a doctor right away.
- **Tell** your doctor what happened, the date and time it happened, and when the vaccination was given.
- **Ask** your doctor, nurse, or health department to report the reaction by filing a Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS) form.

Or you can file this report through the VAERS web site at [www.vaers.hhs.gov](http://www.vaers.hhs.gov), or by calling **1-800-822-7967**.

*VAERS does not provide medical advice.*

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## The National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program

In the event that you or your child has a serious reaction to a vaccine, a federal program has been created to help pay for the care of those who have been harmed.

For details about the National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program, call **1-800-338-2382** or visit their website at [www.hrsa.gov/osp/vicp](http://www.hrsa.gov/osp/vicp)

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## How can I learn more?

- Ask your immunization provider. They can give you the vaccine package insert or suggest other sources of information.
- Call your local or state health department.
- Contact the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):
  - Call **1-800-232-4636 (1-800-CDC-INFO)**
  - Visit CDC's National Immunization Program website at [www.cdc.gov/nip](http://www.cdc.gov/nip)



**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION  
NATIONAL IMMUNIZATION PROGRAM**