

Tetanus, Diphtheria and acellular Pertussis (Tdap) Vaccine

Communicable Disease Control – Factsheet

Vaccination has saved more lives in Canada in the last 50 years than any other medical intervention. Vaccines help your immune system to recognize and fight bacteria and viruses that cause diseases.

What is the Tdap Vaccine?

The Tdap vaccine protects against three different diseases. All three of these diseases can cause serious infection and can sometimes be fatal.

1. Tetanus, often called “lockjaw”, is caused by a toxin released by bacteria. Tetanus infections cause painful tightening of muscles (spasms). Tetanus infections can be very serious and often deadly if the breathing muscles are affected.
2. Diphtheria is caused by bacteria that can make a thick covering (membrane) in the back of the nose and throat, which can lead to breathing problems. These bacteria can also produce a harmful toxin (poison) that can cause paralysis and heart failure.
3. Pertussis, often called “whooping cough,” is also caused by bacteria. Whooping cough causes long coughing spells that make it hard for infants and children to eat, drink, or even breathe.

The Tdap vaccine does not contain any live bacteria or virus, so it cannot cause any of these diseases. It is approved by Health Canada and is provided free by Manitoba Health as part of the routine immunization schedule.

How are these diseases spread?

Tetanus does not spread from person to person. Tetanus spores live in dirt, dust and manure. When there is a cut or burn on the skin, spores can get into the body and cause infection.

Diphtheria and whooping cough can be spread from person to person by coughing, sneezing, or sharing food or drinks. Diphtheria sometimes causes skin sores, and contact with these sores can also spread infection.

Why should my child get the Tdap vaccine?

Vaccination is the best way to protect against tetanus, diphtheria, and whooping cough.

When you are immunized you also help protect others, because someone who is vaccinated is less likely to spread infection.

Who should get the Tdap vaccine?

- All children between the ages of 14 and 16 should get one “booster” shot of Tdap. This vaccine increases the protection that children should already have from their routine childhood immunizations.
- If a child has not had all of their routine immunizations, they may need to follow a different schedule. A public health nurse or doctor can explain which schedule is right for that child.
- Adults who have never been immunized against pertussis should also receive the Tdap vaccine.

Who should NOT get the Tdap vaccine?

Anyone who has had a serious reaction to a previous dose of any vaccine including Guillain Barré Syndrome (GBS), or has any severe allergies should speak with a public health nurse or doctor before getting the Tdap shot.

Anyone who had an unexplained brain injury (encephalopathy) within seven days of a previous pertussis vaccination should not get the Tdap shot.

Anyone with unstable neurologic (brain) conditions such as uncontrolled seizures, may need to wait until their condition has stabilized to get the Tdap shot.

People should not get vaccinated if they have a high fever. But they can still get the Tdap shot if they have a mild illness, like a cold.

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Babies and children under age four need different vaccines to protect against these diseases. For more information speak to your public health nurse or doctor.

Possible side-effects of the Tdap vaccine.

Vaccines are known to be very safe. It is much safer to get this vaccine than to get tetanus, diphtheria, or whooping cough.

Common reactions to the vaccine include soreness, redness and swelling where the vaccine was given. Some may have fever, drowsiness, dizziness, or an upset stomach. These are mild reactions and usually last one to two days. Acetaminophen (Tylenol® or Tempra®) can be given for fever or soreness.

ASA (Aspirin®) should NEVER be given to children because it can cause a severe liver and brain disease called Reye's Syndrome.

It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine because there is a rare possibility of a severe allergic reaction. This can include hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. If this happens after you leave the clinic, **call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department for immediate treatment.**

It has been suggested that there may be an association between tetanus vaccines and Guillain Barré Syndrome (GBS), which is a form of paralysis that is usually temporary. However, people who are not vaccinated can also get GBS, and no evidence has been found for an increased risk of GBS with the Tdap vaccine.

Report any serious or unexpected side-effects to a public health nurse or doctor.

For more information on the Tdap vaccine:

Talk to your doctor or public health nurse.

Call Health Links-Info Santé in Winnipeg at 788-8200; toll-free elsewhere in Manitoba 1-888-315-9257.

Or visit:

Manitoba Public Health website
www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/atoz.html

Canadian Pediatric Society website
www.cps.ca/English/HealthCentres/immunization.htm