



Tetanus, Diphtheria and Pertussis Vaccine (Tdap)

Tdap is a three-in-one vaccine that protects against tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis. It can be used in people 7 years of age and older.

What is tetanus?

Tetanus or lockjaw is a serious disease that can happen if dirt with tetanus germs gets into a cut in the skin. Tetanus germs are found everywhere, usually in soil, dust and manure. Tetanus does not spread from person to person. It causes cramping of the muscles in the neck, arms, legs and stomach, and painful convulsions which can be severe enough to break bones. Tetanus kills 2 out of every 10 people who get it even with early treatment.

What is diphtheria?

Diphtheria is a serious disease of the nose, throat and skin. It causes sore throat, fever and chills. It can be complicated by breathing problems, heart failure and nerve damage. Diphtheria kills about 1 out of every 10 people who get the disease. It is most often passed to others through coughing and sneezing.

What is pertussis?

Pertussis or whooping cough is a serious disease especially in children. People who get this disease have spells of violent coughing. This cough can cause them to vomit or stop breathing for a short period of time. The cough can last for weeks and make it hard to eat, drink or even breathe. Pertussis can cause serious complications such as pneumonia, brain damage, seizures and death. These problems happen most often in babies. However, adolescents and adults with fading immunity to pertussis are a major source of infection for babies. Pertussis spreads very easily from an infected person to others through coughing and sneezing.

Who should get Tdap vaccine?

Tdap vaccine is given to adolescents 14 to 16 years of age as a booster shot, 10 years after the 4 to 6 year old dose of diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis and polio. Tdap is also offered to all adults who were not immunized against pertussis in adolescence. One dose in adults provides lifelong protection against pertussis. While adults need only one lifetime dose of pertussis, booster doses against tetanus and diphtheria are needed every 10 years for continued protection. Parents and caregivers of newborns, infants and young children as well as health care workers are considered a priority to receive Tdap vaccine.

Is Tdap vaccine safe?

Yes. Side effects of Tdap vaccine are mild and usually last only a few days after getting the shot. Pain at the injection site is the most common side effect. Redness and swelling may also occur. A small number of people may have fever, vomiting, headache, diarrhea, nausea, chills, generalized body ache, decreased energy or sore and swollen joints after having a shot. Allergic reactions and other severe reactions after the shot are very rare. **You should always discuss the benefits and risks of any vaccine with your health care provider or local public health unit.**

Who should not get the vaccine?

These include persons with:

- a serious allergic reaction to a previous dose of a vaccine containing diphtheria, tetanus and/or pertussis
- a history of an allergic reaction to any part of the vaccine (aluminum phosphate or 2-phenoxyethanol, formaldehyde, glutaraldehyde)
- a history of development of severe redness, swelling and ulceration at the injection site following a previous dose of tetanus/diphtheria-containing vaccine
- a history of encephalopathy (a disease of the brain) of undetermined cause within 7 days of having a pertussis-containing vaccine
- a history of Guillain-Barre' syndrome less than 8 weeks after a previous dose of tetanus-containing vaccine
- a history of progressive or unstable neurologic disorder

Please consult with your health care provider if you:

- have a severe infection with a fever higher than 38°C
- are pregnant

When should I call my doctor/nurse practitioner?

Call your doctor/nurse practitioner or go to the nearest hospital emergency department if any of the following symptoms develop within 3 days of getting the shot:

- hives
- swelling of the face or mouth
- trouble breathing
- very pale colour and serious drowsiness
- high fever (over 40°C or 104°F)
- convulsions or seizures
- other serious problems

Who should I talk to if I have any more questions about Tdap vaccine?

Talk to your doctor/nurse practitioner or call Renfrew County and District Health Unit Immunization Information Line at 613-732-9436 or 1-833-773-0004.

Your record of protection

After you get any immunization, make sure your personal immunization record (Yellow Card) is updated. Keep it in a safe place!

Renfrew County and District Health Unit

141 Lake St.
Pembroke, Ontario K8A 5L8
613-732-9436 or 1-833-773-0004.

Adapted from Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. Tetanus-diphtheria-pertussis (Tdap) Vaccine Questions and Answers for Parents and Caregivers (June 2012)

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