

NMH Reminds You that Vaccines Aren't Just For Babies!

Parents can do a number of things to ensure a healthy future for their child. One of the most important actions parents can take is to make sure their children are up to date on their vaccines.

Preteens and teens need four vaccines to protect against serious diseases:

- Meningococcal conjugate vaccine to protect against meningitis and blood infections (septicemia).
- HPV (human papilloma virus) vaccine to protect against cancers caused by HPV.
- Tdap vaccine to protect against tetanus, diphtheria, and whooping cough (pertussis).
- A yearly flu vaccine to protect against seasonal flu.

Teens and young adults may also be vaccinated with a serogroup B meningococcal vaccine. Parents can send their preteens and teens to middle school and high school – and also off to college – protected from vaccine-preventable diseases by following the recommended immunization schedule.

But what about before your child is born? Did you know that vaccines can play a role in creating a healthy pregnancy? Women should be up to date on their vaccinations before becoming pregnant. They should receive vaccines against both flu and whooping cough (pertussis) during pregnancy. These vaccines protect the mother and her baby by preventing illnesses and complications. Getting vaccinated during pregnancy also allows the mother to pass some protection on to her baby. Some women may need to receive vaccines after giving birth.

Women who are planning to have a child may need to receive vaccines before their pregnancy. The measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine is one example. Women who have not received the full series of the MMR vaccine should get it at least 4 weeks before their pregnancy begins. This is important to avoid some diseases that can lead to significant pregnancy complications, including birth defects. Rubella, for example, can cause serious problems during pregnancy. That's why women need to have immunity before becoming pregnant

Pregnant women should get flu and whooping cough vaccines during their pregnancy (if they have not already received the vaccine during the current flu season). Pregnant women are at increased risk for serious complications from the flu. When a pregnant woman gets a flu shot, she is protecting herself from getting sick with flu. Though not specifically examined among pregnant women, there are some studies that suggest that flu vaccination can make illness milder among people who do still get sick. Another benefit of getting a flu shot during pregnancy is that antibodies are passed on to baby.

Children younger than 6 months are too young to get a flu vaccine, but they are at high risk of being hospitalized from flu. Getting vaccinated during pregnancy can provide baby with flu protection that can last several months. Pregnant women should also receive a whooping cough shot. Whooping cough can be serious for anyone, but for a newborn it can be life threatening. Studies show that getting the whooping cough vaccine while pregnant helps protect the baby from getting this disease. If the baby does still get sick, he is less likely to develop severe complications if his mom was vaccinated. Both flu and whooping cough vaccines can give the baby early protection against disease. For that to happen, pregnant women must receive those vaccines during their pregnancy.

In some cases, women may also need vaccinations after giving birth. Pregnancy is also a good time for mothers to start learning about vaccines for children. They'll want to know about all the vaccines that protect babies after they're born. To help you navigate the necessary vaccine schedule and tailor it to fit your specific circumstances, come visit us at Newman Memorial Hospital. We offer a walk-in Immunization Clinic with no appointment necessary. It is available Monday through Thursday from 8:30 to 4:00 and Friday from 8:30 to noon for infants and children up to 18 years of age. Adult immunizations are also available. For more information or to check and see if you and your child are up to date, call 580-938-5537.