

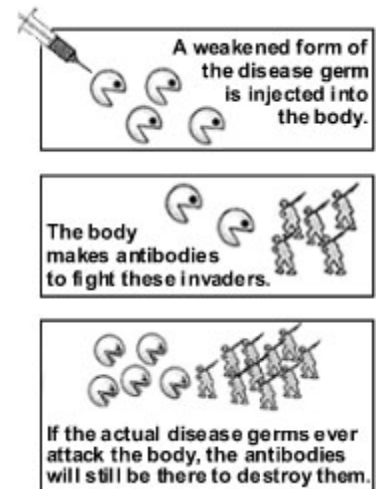
Frequently Asked Questions about...

Vaccination

Q. What is vaccination?

- A. There are many diseases that can cause people to get ill and spread infection to others. The body has the ability to protect itself from these infections through a defense mechanism called the **immune system**. When “foreign” invaders or **antigens** enter the body, **antibodies** (proteins) are created to destroy the antigens. **Immunity** is a long-term protection that results from the destruction of the antigen by the antibodies.

Vaccines contain killed or weakened antigens or part of the antigens from the disease causing agent. When they are injected into the body, the body produces antibodies. Through **vaccination**, this immune response also leads to immunity without causing the signs and symptoms seen from getting the disease itself.



Q. Why is it important to vaccinate?

- A. Many diseases can be prevented through vaccination. Not only do these diseases cause illness, they are expensive to treat, result in time lost from work, and can even lead to death. According to the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services, each year, nearly 50,000 adults die from vaccine-preventable infections in the United States. In the elderly population, pneumonia and influenza represent the fifth leading cause of death in the United States. Those who get vaccinated protect themselves from getting the disease and help prevent the spread of disease to others.

Benefits of vaccination:

- Establish long-term protection in the individual
- Help prevent outbreaks from occurring
- May facilitate herd immunity
- Can lead to the elimination or the eradication of diseases (like smallpox)
- Allow us to focus our resources on diseases that do not currently have vaccines

Q. Why may assisted living facility (ALF) or nursing home (NH) residents benefit from vaccination?

- A. ALF or NH residents may be at greater risk for serious infections and complications from vaccine-preventable diseases due to age, weakened immune systems, or underlying health conditions. Residents often live in close quarters and have frequent contact with each other, leading to an increased risk for transmission of disease. It is important to encourage family members, visitors, staff members, as well as residents, to get vaccinated to protect each other from the spread of disease.

Q. Are vaccines safe?

- A. Vaccines are safe and effective. Vaccines go through a strict regimen of testing before being approved for public use by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). This is to ensure that they have the highest level of safety. After licensure, vaccines continue to be monitored for safety. Vaccines may cause mild side effects such as soreness at the injection site. Serious side effects are very rare. The risks associated with diseases are more significant than the potential risks from the vaccines themselves.

Q. What can I do as a care provider in an assisted living facility or nursing home?

A. Care providers in assisted living facilities and nursing homes may be at risk for exposure to and transmission of vaccine-preventable diseases. Maintenance of immunity is an essential part of prevention.

Suggested strategies include:

- Learn about the different vaccines recommended for care providers in your setting
- Help your facility keep accurate and up-to-date resident and employee vaccination records
- Maintain your own individual vaccination record
- Familiarize yourself with the adult vaccination schedule recommendations (revised annually)
- Learn about procedures for appropriate vaccine administration and documentation



Q. Which vaccinations are recommended?

A. Recommendations may vary based on underlying medical conditions, occupation, and age. CDC publishes updated vaccination guidelines every year.

Federal regulations (Occupational Safety and Health Administration’s Bloodborne Pathogen Standard 1910.1030) state that all employees who may have contact with blood or other infectious body materials should be offered the **hepatitis B** vaccination series unless the employee has previously received the complete series, antibody testing has revealed that the employee is immune, or the vaccine is contraindicated (not recommended) for medical reasons.

State regulations (12VAC5-371-110) require nursing homes to provide or arrange for the administration of a **pneumococcal** vaccination and an annual **influenza** vaccination according to the most recent recommendations unless the vaccination is contraindicated or the resident declines the vaccination offer.

Q. Which diseases are vaccine-preventable?

A. In the United States, vaccines are available for protection against a variety of diseases, and are recommended for individuals based on age, occupation, underlying medical conditions, international travels or other risk factors. Some of the diseases that vaccines protect against include:

- Chickenpox (varicella)
- Diphtheria
- Hepatitis A
- Hepatitis B
- Human papillomavirus (HPV)
- Influenza (flu)
- Measles
- Meningococcal disease
- Mumps
- Pertussis (whooping cough)
- Pneumococcal disease
- Polio
- Rubella
- Shingles (herpes zoster)
- Tetanus (lockjaw)

Contact your local health department if you have additional questions about immunization or vaccine-preventable diseases