

Pointers For Parents

Keep Teens In The Game By Getting Them Vaccinated

(NAPSA)—Some of the most common everyday activities of preteens and teens may actually put them at risk for serious infectious diseases. Even healthy teens are at risk for meningococcal disease (including meningitis), influenza (or the “flu”) and pertussis (also known as whooping cough). These are all potentially life-threatening diseases that can spread easily when teens are in close contact; the good news is that teens can help protect themselves through vaccination.

John Kach knows this firsthand. Now in his 20s, John was a college basketball player when he was diagnosed with meningococcal meningitis, a rare but serious infection. He fought for his life for six weeks, and doctors were forced to amputate both his legs and all his fingers.

“I knew there was a vaccine to help protect me against meningitis but didn’t get it,” said John. “I’m lucky to have survived.”

To help spread the word about the importance of vaccination, the National Basketball Association (NBA) and the Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA) are collaborating with the Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine and Sanofi Pasteur on *Vaccines for Teens* (vaccinesforteens.net), a national campaign to increase awareness among parents and their teens about the importance of immunization against serious diseases.

Vaccines for Teens urges parents to help keep their teens and preteens in the game by getting them immunized against these serious diseases:



Several potentially life-threatening diseases can be spread among teens by everyday activities. Fortunately, they may also be prevented by vaccination—talk to your health care provider today.

Meningococcal Disease/ Meningococcal Meningitis:

Although rare, meningococcal disease (including meningitis) is a serious and life-threatening infection that can lead to death within 24 to 48 hours of first symptoms. Up to one in five survivors are left with long-term disabilities including limb amputations, brain damage and hearing loss. The disease can be spread by everyday activities, like sharing drinking glasses, water bottles and eating utensils.

Influenza, or the “Flu”:

Influenza is not the common cold. It is a viral infection that can lead to serious complications like pneumonia or even death. Vaccination is safe and effective and the best way to help protect against influenza and its complications. Immunization should begin as soon as vaccine becomes available in your community in the late summer or early fall. In most seasons, influenza virus activity peaks in February or March, so vaccination throughout the entire influenza season is beneficial and recommended.

Pertussis, Commonly Called “Whooping Cough”:

Whooping cough is more than just a minor cough—it can last weeks or months and can lead to cracked ribs, pneumonia or trips to the hospital. Teens and adults can also spread whooping cough to younger children, particularly infants, in which it can become life threatening.

Help Keep Teens Protected

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends the following vaccinations:

- Influenza vaccination: every year for everyone 6 months of age and older
- Meningococcal vaccination: recommended for preteens and teens
- Whooping cough vaccination: a single dose of tetanus, diphtheria, and acellular pertussis (Tdap) vaccine for adults and adolescents, especially those in close contact with a baby.

“With teens in such close contact in classrooms and on school sports teams, these infectious diseases can spread easily from student to student,” said Larry D’Angelo, M.D., M.P.H., president of the Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine. “Immunization is a safe and effective way to help teens stay protected, yet vaccination rates remain low in this population.”

Consider getting your preteens and teens vaccinated the next time you’re in the doctor’s office. There are many chances during the year, including back-to-school checkups, sports physicals, pre-adolescent health care visits and sick visits for minor illnesses.

Visit www.vaccinesforteens.net for more information.