

Splurge - Volume 3 Issue 9 (September 2008)

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VACCINATIONS: Not Just for Kids Anymore

Another winter, and again we come to the season when the words “flu shot” start getting tossed around. Guesses of how bad the flu will be this year and what strain is dominant, will dominate the health news. Most of the time we think of preventing disease such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, stroke; but what we don't think about is the prevention of infectious disease.

Why should we update vaccinations as an adult? Well, many of us missed some of our childhood vaccinations when we needed them; immunity can wane over time; as you age you become more susceptible to diseases caused by infections, and; there are most likely new vaccines now that weren't around when you were a child. Since the idea of vaccinations is again floating in our consciousness, let's have a look at what other shots could benefit adults, particularly those of us over the age of forty.

Aches, Fever, Flu

First off, let's discuss the flu shot. This is a controversial one every year, but is increasingly recommended for more and more populations of Americans. Influenza is a leading cause of hospital visits and deaths. Chronically ill adults and the elderly are especially susceptible to health complications due to the flu virus, so these populations should strongly consider speaking with their physician about administering a flu shot. Though a small percentage of folks develop flu symptoms after the shot, it remains a vaccine I highly recommend this time of year.

Shingles: Why This New Vaccine is Important

In 2006, the FDA approved administration of the varicella-zoster virus vaccine for shingles. Shingles (as anyone who has experienced it will tell you) is a painful, uncomfortable condition that can take months from which to recover. Shingles is a tricky virus, as it lies dormant sometimes for decades after exposure to the chickenpox virus. The CDC (Centers for Disease Control) recommends this vaccine for everyone over the age of 60, or for anyone who has had shingles in the past. This virus is incredibly painful and can cause scarring and nerve damage, so it is nothing to take lightly. Immediate treatment can save lives and reduce painful swelling and itching. Many studies show a correlation between the development of this virus and stress – just one more reason to reduce stress wherever you can in your life. If you have been diagnosed with shingles in the past, speak with your physician about strengthening your immunity by receiving the varicella-zoster virus vaccine.

HPV Vaccine: For Adult Women Too

The year 2006 also saw the introduction of another vaccine: the HPV (human papilloma virus) vaccination. The vaccine is recommended for all females between the ages of 11-26. The HPV vaccine covers four separate strains of the virus, and ideally should be given before the patient becomes sexually active. However, more and more research is showing that women over the age of 26 should also be

inoculated. I recommend all women and parents of young girls have a discussion with their doctors about this very important vaccine. HPV causes 70% of cervical cancers, and 90% of genital warts. HPV is astonishingly easy to transmit, so this vaccine has the potential to save many lives. Other vaccines to discuss at your next doctor visit:

- Tetanus: this should be repeated every ten years.
- Chickenpox: if you are adult, and have never had chickenpox, speak with your physician about this shot. This virus can be extremely serious in adults.
- Bacterial Pneumonia: this is recommended for all adults over the age of 65.
- Measles, Mumps & Rubella: check with your doctor about the need for a booster shot.

Before you travel, be sure to check with the CDC's recommendations for immunizations for the area you're visiting before embarking on a trip, and make an appointment for vaccine updates prior to your departure.

If you have any questions about these or other vaccinations (like the smallpox, hepatitis A, or meningococcus vaccines), discuss these with your family physician. Specifications are varied as to the recommended populations and indications for each vaccine.

In every instance, however, giving yourself and your loved ones the best chance at a long life lived in the best, healthiest way means at least becoming more educated about these important, life-saving shots. Technology has progressed so far and preventative measures continue to increase our longevity and resistance to diseases. This is exactly the kind of technology that can improve our days, and make us even healthier.

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