A guide to immunisation for young people school years 8 to 13 (ages 13-18)
Introduction

This guide is for young people aged 13 to 18 and their parents. It explains:

- about the immunisations that are given to young people, usually at school;
- why these immunisations are needed; and
- what side effects they might have.

This guide also answers some of the most common questions about these immunisations.

If you have any questions or want more information, talk to your doctor, school nurse or the nurse at your doctor's surgery. You can also visit our website at www.immunisation.nhs.uk or call NHS Direct on 0845 46 47.

The national childhood immunisation programme has meant that dangerous diseases such as tetanus, diphtheria and polio have practically disappeared in the UK. But these diseases could come back, and that is why it's so important for you to protect yourself.
Why do we need immunisation?
Your body has a natural defence system – the immune system – to protect it against disease. It does this by producing substances called antibodies which fight off the disease and infection. There are some diseases that can kill you or cause lasting damage to your health. Immunisation helps your immune system to fight these diseases.

How does immunisation work?
You are given a vaccine which contains a small part of the bacterium or virus that causes a disease, or tiny amounts of the chemicals the bacterium produces. Vaccines are specially treated so they do not cause the disease itself. They work by encouraging the body’s immune system to make antibodies. So if you come into contact with the disease, the antibodies will recognise it and be ready to protect you.

What immunisations do I need now?
You need a top up (booster) of the tetanus and diphtheria (Td) vaccine and the polio vaccine to increase your immunity to these diseases. If you haven’t already been protected against measles, mumps and rubella (with the MMR vaccine) or meningitis C you should have these vaccines as well.
What is tetanus?
Tetanus is a painful disease that affects the muscles and can cause breathing problems. It is caused when germs found in the soil and manure get into the body through dirty cuts and burns. Tetanus affects the central nervous system and it can kill.

What is diphtheria?
Diphtheria is a serious disease that usually begins with a sore throat and can quickly develop to cause problems with breathing. It can damage the heart and nervous system, and in severe cases it can kill. Diphtheria can be spread by close contact with an infected person.

What is polio?
Polio is a virus that attacks the nervous system and can permanently paralyse the muscles. If it affects the chest muscles, it can kill.
Common questions about immunisation

If I was immunised against tetanus, diphtheria and polio as a child, am I still protected?
You will not necessarily be protected as immunity to tetanus, diphtheria and polio can fade over time. This immunisation will top up your level of antibodies and help keep you protected in the future.

How do the Td and polio boosters work?
The top up boosters contain tiny amounts of the chemicals produced by the bacteria which cause tetanus and diphtheria. The polio viruses are treated so that they shouldn't harm you. If you've had these vaccines before, the boosters increase your immunity to protect you over the years ahead. If you come into contact with one of these diseases in the future, the antibodies your body produces after the vaccine will fight the disease to stop an infection taking hold.

How many boosters do I need to have?
- In all you need five doses of tetanus, diphtheria and polio vaccines to build up and keep your immunity.
- You should have received the first three doses as a baby, the fourth dose you should have had when you were between three and five years old, and you need the fifth dose now.

If you think you may have missed any of your doses, talk to the school nurse or your doctor.

Will I need more boosters in the future?
- You may need a further booster for tetanus if you have an injury, such as a dirty cut or burn, which could lead to a tetanus infection.
- You will not need further polio boosters unless you are travelling to a country that still has polio.

When everyone is immunised, polio will be wiped out from the world and then there won't be any need to immunise against polio. Polio, like smallpox, will become a disease of the past.
Common questions about immunisation continued:

How will I be given the Td and polio boosters?
You will have an injection against tetanus and diphtheria (the Td vaccine) in your upper arm. The polio vaccine will be given as drops in your mouth.

Nobody likes injections, but it is very quick. The needles used are very small and you should only feel a tiny pinprick. If you’re a bit nervous about having the injection, tell the nurse or doctor before you have it.

Can everyone have the Td and polio boosters?
A very small number of people shouldn’t have the boosters for medical reasons. The nurse or doctor will ask you a few questions before giving you the booster to make sure they’re safe for you.

Are there any side effects?
- It is common to get some swelling and redness where you have the injection.
- Sometimes a small painless lump develops, but this usually disappears in a few weeks.
- More serious effects are rare, and you should tell your doctor if you suffer from any problem which you think may be linked to immunisation.
- There is a very small chance of getting polio from this booster. Less than one case of polio is reported for more than 10 million vaccinations given. Since the first booster was given in 1970 there have been only two cases of polio linked to the dose that you’ll get.
Is there anything special I should do after having the Td and polio booster?
The polio vaccine contains live viruses which you may pass in your faeces (poo) for up to six weeks after you’ve been immunised. So in the weeks after having the polio booster, make sure you wash your hands thoroughly after going to the toilet. If you change the nappy of a baby who’s recently had this vaccine, thoroughly wash your hands before and after.

Are these the only immunisations I need?
When you’re having your Td and polio boosters it’s a good idea to check with the nurse or doctor that all your other immunisations are up to date (for example, MMR (measles, mumps and rubella), meningitis C and, for some people, hepatitis B).

Knowing about meningitis and septicaemia
Meningitis is an inflammation of the lining of the brain. The same germs that cause meningitis may cause septicaemia (blood poisoning). Meningitis and septicaemia are both very serious and you must get treatment straight away. If you haven’t been immunised against meningitis C, you should have this done now. This vaccine only protects against one type of meningitis and septicaemia so you still need to know the signs and symptoms.