Teenage immunisations
(School years 8 to 13, ages 13 to 18)

Your questions answered

Includes information on tetanus, diphtheria and polio vaccine
Introduction

This guide is for teenagers aged 13 to 18, and their parents or guardians. It explains:

- the immunisations that are given to teenagers, usually when they are still at school;
- why these immunisations are needed, and
- what side effects they might have.

The guide also answers some of the most common questions about these immunisations. In particular, it describes the Td/IPV vaccine that boosts the protection you got as a child against tetanus (T), diphtheria (d) and polio (IPV – inactivated polio vaccine).

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 the website at www.immunisation.nhs.uk or call NHS Direct on 0845 4647.
Your questions answered

Why do we need immunisation?

The national immunisation programme has meant that dangerous diseases, such as polio, have disappeared in the UK. But these diseases could come back – they are still around in many countries throughout the world. That’s why it’s so important for you to protect yourself. In the UK, diseases are kept at bay by the high immunisation rates.

How do vaccines work?

A vaccine contains a small part of the bacterium or virus that causes a disease, or tiny amounts of the chemicals the bacterium produces. Vaccines work by causing the body’s immune system to make antibodies (substances to fight infections and diseases). So if you come into contact with the infection, the antibodies will recognise it and protect you.
What is tetanus?
Tetanus is a painful disease affecting the nervous system which can lead to muscle spasms, cause breathing problems and can kill. It is caused when germs found in the soil and manure get into the body through open cuts or burns. Tetanus cannot be passed from person to person.

What is diphtheria?
Diphtheria is a serious disease that usually begins with a sore throat and can quickly cause breathing problems. It can damage the heart and nervous system, and in severe cases, it can kill.

What is polio?
Polio is a virus that attacks the nervous system which can cause permanent paralysis of muscles. If it affects the chest muscles or the brain, polio can kill.

If I was immunised against tetanus, diphtheria and polio as a child, am I still protected?
You may still have some protection, but you need this booster to complete your routine immunisations and give you longer-term protection.
How many boosters do I need to have?
You need a total of five doses of tetanus, diphtheria and polio vaccines to build up and keep your immunity. You should have had:

- the first three doses as a baby
- the fourth dose when you were between three and five years old, before you started school, and
- the fifth dose is due now.

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

Will I need more boosters in the future?
You will probably not need further boosters of these vaccines. However, you may need extra doses of some vaccines if you are visiting certain countries. Check with the nurse at your surgery.

How will I be given the TdapV booster?
You will have an injection in your upper arm. Nobody likes injections, but it is very quick. The needles used are small and you should feel only a tiny pinprick. If you are a bit nervous about having the injection, tell the nurse or doctor before you have it.
Are there any reasons why I should not be immunised?
There are very few teenagers who cannot have the Td/IPV vaccine.

You should not have the vaccine if you have had:

- a confirmed anaphylactic reaction to a previous vaccine, or
- a confirmed anaphylactic reaction to neomycin, streptomycin or polymyxin B (antibiotics that may be added to vaccines in very tiny amounts).

There are no other medical reasons why these vaccines should not be given. If you are worried, talk to the nurse or doctor.