



**VACCINES...**

**...NOT JUST FOR CHILDREN ANYMORE...**

**M**ore than 50,000 adults in the United States die every year – because they think they are immune to immunizations. Tens of thousands of US adults die each year from vaccine-preventable diseases and their complications, more than either breast cancer, HIV/AIDS, or motor vehicle traffic accidents, yet overall vaccination rates remain low.

Many adults think when they hit the voting age; it's time to start ignoring the simple steps to staying healthy and living longer. Just as our cars need maintenance to last longer, the body needs maintenance, and that includes recommended vaccinations.

The National Foundation for Infectious Diseases (NFID) in partnership with a number of leading medical experts and national health organizations recently launched a campaign to bring awareness to adult immunizations.

Keeping up with recommended vaccinations could save your life, and they can also help prevent a number of serious diseases as well, such as shingles, the flu, etc. Vaccines are for everyone, not just children. There are some vaccines specifically recommended for adults. These adult vaccines protect against diseases more common in adults than children. Some vaccines protect against diseases that can be more serious when contracted by adults.

Getting vaccinated reduces your risk of getting diseases like shingles, measles, whooping cough and influenza.

For example, the influenza vaccine (flu vaccine) is available for both adults and children and is recommended annually. In this case, it's not that our immune system forgets how to fight the influenza virus; rather the virus can change from year to year so we have to retrain our immune system to fight the new strains. Each year's influenza vaccine may contain different antigens from the previous year's vaccine. The new antigens are specially customized to train the immune system to fight the current season's influenza viruses.

Shingles is a disease caused by the same pathogen as chickenpox. The pathogen hides in nerve cells for years and can re-emerge in older adults to cause shingles. This means anyone who has ever had chickenpox is at risk. Shingles is rare in children, so the vaccine is generally recommended for adults. Chickenpox, contracted by an adult, can cause serious complications including pneumonia.

Pneumococcal disease is a very serious illness for adults. Invasive pneumococcal disease kills way too many people in the United States each year, most of them 65 years of age or older. A single dose of pneumococcal vaccine is all older adults need to be protected.

Anyone can get pneumococcal disease. In addition to persons 65 and older, high-risk groups include individuals with weak immune systems, sickle cell disease, as well as Alaskan Natives, certain American Indian populations and residents of chronic or long-term care facilities. Further, children under 2 years of age who live in group care settings and those with certain illnesses are at higher risk than other children.

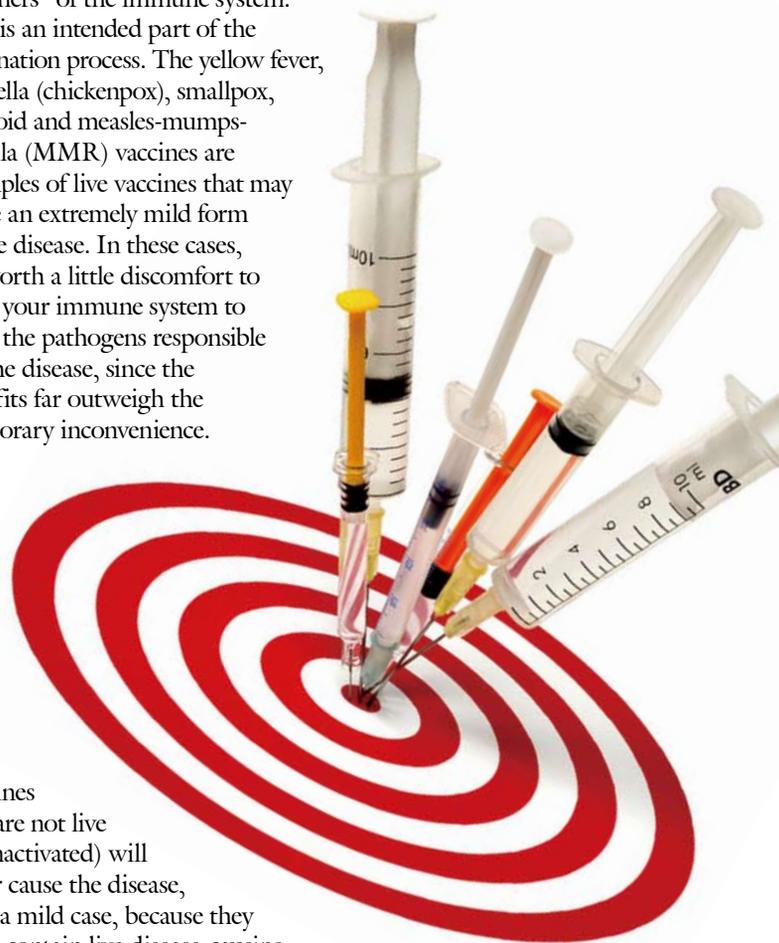
There are other adult vaccines that are boosters of childhood immunizations. The immune system uses memory cells to “remember” how to build the tools to fight a pathogen, over time this memory fades. Booster vaccines “refresh” the immune system's memory so it can continue providing protection against the disease.

### CAN VACCINES GIVE YOU A DISEASE?

Live, attenuated vaccines contain a version of the living microbe that has been weakened in the lab so it can't cause disease. Because a live, attenuated vaccine is the closest thing to a natural infection, these vaccines are good “teachers” of the immune system.

This is an intended part of the vaccination process. The yellow fever, varicella (chickenpox), smallpox, typhoid and measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccines are examples of live vaccines that may cause an extremely mild form of the disease. In these cases, it's worth a little discomfort to train your immune system to fight the pathogens responsible for the disease, since the benefits far outweigh the temporary inconvenience.

Vaccines that are not live (or inactivated) will never cause the disease, even a mild case, because they don't contain live disease-causing pathogens. For example, the inactivated influenza shot is not a live vaccine and so it can't give you influenza. So why do some people come down with flu-like symptoms after a vaccination? Influenza vaccines are generally given during “flu season” which is prime time for all sorts of





viruses that cause upper respiratory infections. Influenza vaccines only protect you from the influenza virus, not the dozens of other viruses that can cause similar, but generally much milder symptoms. So, there's a reasonable chance of getting a cold or some other "flu like" illness soon after getting the influenza vaccine. It doesn't help that we call so many illnesses "the flu" that aren't caused by the influenza virus. For example, there is no relationship between what most of us call the "stomach flu" and influenza virus. Intestinal upsets are caused by an entirely different set of viruses. So, the influenza vaccine will not protect you against stomach flu.

#### **DO YOU AVOID VACCINES FOR FEAR OF SIDE EFFECTS?**

The chance of experiencing a serious side effect, like an allergic reaction after vaccination, is less than one in a million. That means 999,999 people out of 1,000,000 do not suffer any serious adverse effects after vaccination. It is more likely for someone to suffer a severe allergic reaction from aspirin than a vaccine.

Vaccines are always safer than contracting the diseases they are designed to protect against, but to say vaccines are completely harmless isn't true. Vaccines can cause side effects, but most are short-lived and result in only very mild discomfort. Redness and some swelling around the injection site are some of the more common side effects of vaccines.

A word of caution, anyone who is allergic to any component of a vaccine, has had a serious adverse reaction after vaccination, or anyone immunocompromised should speak with a physician before being vaccinated. Pregnant women should consult their physicians about vaccination. Some vaccines are recommended during pregnancy and can help protect your child after birth, others are not recommended during pregnancy.

*–This information provided courtesy of NFID (The National Foundation for Infectious Diseases)*

*NFID and its partners have created a comprehensive campaign to address recommended vaccines and timeframes specifically for adults, which includes charts, FAQs and links to other informational sites. This information is available on the foundation's website at [www.adultimmunization.org](http://www.adultimmunization.org).*

*Be sure and visit the site for information about your immunization needs, and as always, be sure and visit your physician for specifics and suggestions.*

*It's smart to take the right steps to maintain good health – at any age.*