

Diphtheria, Tetanus and Acellular Pertussis (Tdap) Vaccine



Region of Waterloo
PUBLIC HEALTH AND
EMERGENCY SERVICES

What is diphtheria?

Diphtheria is a serious disease of the nose, throat and skin. It is passed to others through coughing and sneezing. It causes sore throat, fever and chills. It can lead to breathing problems, heart failure and nerve damage. Treatment for diphtheria includes an antitoxin, followed by antibiotics. However, it is becoming more difficult to treat the diphtheria bacteria due to antibiotic resistance. Diphtheria kills one out of every 10 people who get the disease.

What is tetanus?

Tetanus, or lockjaw is a serious disease that can happen if dirt with the tetanus bacteria in it gets into a cut in the skin. Tetanus bacteria are found everywhere, usually in soil, dust, and manure. It does not spread from person to person. Tetanus causes cramping of the muscles in the neck, arms, leg and stomach and painful convulsions which can be severe enough to break bones. Even with early treatment, tetanus kills 10–20% of those who get it.

What is pertussis?

Pertussis, or whooping cough is a serious disease that can infect people of any age. Adolescents and adults are the most common source of infection for infants and young children. Pertussis spreads very easily through coughing or sneezing. Pertussis can cause spells of violent coughing which leads to vomiting. The cough may cause breathing to stop for a short period of time. The cough can last for weeks and can make it hard to eat, drink or even breathe.

Pertussis is most severe in babies and young children. Serious complications happen most often in babies. Pneumonia can occur in more than two out of 10 children with pertussis. It can also cause brain damage and death. Pertussis can be treated with antibiotics. However, often it is not diagnosed until a person had been sick for days or weeks.

Who should get the vaccine?

The combined acellular pertussis, tetanus and diphtheria vaccine was introduced in 1997 to replace the whole cell pertussis vaccine and is licensed for use in persons aged seven years and older.

Pertussis is most severe in infants less than one year of age. They often need to be cared for in a hospital. Adults who have or plan to have close contact with a child under 12 months of age should ensure they are immunized.

All pregnant women should get the vaccine for each pregnancy to protect the newborn infants against pertussis. This vaccine is safe anytime during pregnancy. It is best given between 27–32 weeks of pregnancy to provide the best protection for the infant by passing on protection from the mother before the baby is born.

Tetanus, Diphtheria, and Acellular Pertussis Vaccine

When the recommended number of shots of diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis vaccines are given, over 85% of people are protected against diphtheria, over 95% of people are protected against tetanus and about 85% of people are protected against pertussis. Vaccination also makes these diseases milder for those who may catch them.

Eligibility

In Ontario, Tdap vaccine is provided free of charge 10 years after the 4–6 year tetanus shot. Adults are also eligible to receive one lifetime (publicly funded) dose of the vaccine. This lifetime dose replaces one of the Td booster doses given every 10 years.

Who should NOT get the vaccine?

- Anyone with a high fever or serious infection worse than a cold
- Anyone who has had a serious allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to a previous dose of diphtheria, tetanus or pertussis vaccine
- Anyone with a serious allergy to any component of the vaccine, such as aluminum or 2-phenoxyethanol (preservative) or latex (in cap of preloaded syringe)

Side effects

Most reactions are mild and last only a few days after getting the needle. Mild pain, swelling and redness are common at the spot where the needle was given. A few people may get a mild fever, headache, muscle aches, loss of appetite or feel tired for a day or two after the Tdap vaccine.

When should I seek medical attention?

You should seek immediate medical attention if you develop hives, swelling of the face or mouth, trouble breathing, serious drowsiness or other serious problems.

Your record of protection

After any immunization, ensure your personal immunization record or "yellow card" is updated. Keep it in a safe place.

Questions?

Talk to your health care provider or contact Public Health at 519-575-4400.

The image shows a yellow immunization record card. At the top, it says "Immunization Record" and "Fiche d'immunisation". Below that, there are fields for "Name / Nom", "Date of Birth / Date de naissance", and "Ontario Health Card Number / Numéro de carte Santé de l'Ontario". There are also some small numbers and letters in the date field. At the bottom right, there is the Ontario logo.

Alternate formats of this document are available upon request.

Region of Waterloo Public Health and Emergency Services

Vaccine Preventable Disease
519-575-4400