

Expert speak: Adults need vaccinations too

Did you think only children need vaccinations? It is a must for adults too. In this exclusive article, Dr Belliappa, Center Head, RxDx, a multispecialty healthcare center in Bengaluru, busts some common myths regarding adult immunisation.

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According to the WHO, global vaccination coverage is still 85 per cent with no significant increase over the past few years. © Shutterstock

Most of us think that immunisation and vaccines are only for small children. However, vaccinations are recommended even for adults to prevent diseases and relapses. More than 25 per cent of

mortality is due to infectious diseases that can be easily prevented with vaccination. According to the World Health Organisation, global vaccination coverage is still 85 per cent with no significant increase over the past few years. However, if global immunisation coverage improves, an additional 1.5 million deaths can be avoided. Different types of vaccines are recommended for adults based on their age, health conditions, lifestyle, occupation, prior vaccinations and travel.

Here, I would like to help you separate facts from fiction about adult vaccination.

Myth 1: Vaccines are for children only.

Fact: The CDC (Centers for Disease and Prevention) has recommended immunisation schedules for adults depending on their age and health conditions. All adults should talk to their doctor about the potential risks of various diseases, which can be prevented by taking vaccines.

Myth 2: Vaccine is for very old people.

Fact: Infections like pneumonia, hepatitis B and typhoid can happen at any age. These are life-threatening diseases. By getting vaccinated, you can protect yourself and your family from these deadly diseases and prevent unnecessary suffering.

Myth 3: Healthy adults don't need vaccines.

Fact: If you are a healthy and active adult you might think you do not have a risk of preventable diseases. However, our immune system weakens as we age and at the age of 65 or more, adults are 8 times more likely to be hospitalised due to infections like pneumococcal pneumonia in comparison to adults who are younger than 50.

Myth 4: Vaccines are not effective in adults.

Fact: According to the CDC, vaccination is the safest and most effective way to protect yourself from diseases. Vaccines undergo years of vigorous testing before the FDA gives them license to be used by doctors. Therefore, there is no risk involved in taking vaccines from a doctor at a medical facility.

Myth 5: If I was vaccinated in childhood, I don't need any vaccine as an adult.

Fact: You may have got vaccinations done as a child. But some vaccines require a booster dose to give you full protection. It will not offer life-long protection against some diseases like tetanus or pertussis (whooping cough). Also, you may not have got some of the newer vaccines that are available now. For example, the flu vaccine has to be taken once every year to reduce the risk of flu and its complications. The TD (Tetanus and Diphtheria) should be taken once in every 10 years.

Myth 6: There is no vaccine only for adults.

Fact: Some vaccines are recommended only for adults, who are at a higher risk of certain diseases like shingles, which is caused by reactivation of the chicken pox virus. The risk of this disease increases with age. The shingles vaccine is recommended for adults of 50 years or more (currently not available in India). Also, Pneumococcal vaccine is recommended for adults who are 65 years of age or more.

Myth 7: If I am healthy and I am travelling, I don't need any vaccine.

Fact: You may get infected while travelling to new places, no matter how healthy you are. You should meet your doctor a few weeks before you travel and discuss what vaccines you need before travelling. Health risks are higher in developing countries and rural areas because of differences in sanitary conditions, water sources and immunisation covered. Your risk of getting infected depends on where you are going, the length of stay, your health and your vaccine history. Most travellers may require hepatitis A, typhoid and measles vaccine. The yellow fever vaccine is needed for travel to parts of Africa and South America.

Myth 8: Adults only need flu vaccine.

Fact: This is not true. Adults need many more vaccines than just the flu vaccine. The DPT (Diphtheria, Pertussis and Tetanus) vaccine is recommended for women during pregnancy and

once for all adults who have not it taken previously. Tetanus vaccine is recommended once every 10 years. The HPV vaccine should be taken by women who are 26 years or younger and men who are 21 years or younger. The chicken pox vaccine is recommended for all adults who never had chicken pox or received vaccination in childhood.

Talk to your healthcare provider about adult vaccination and keeping yourself fully immunised from various deadly diseases.

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