

Too Few U.S. Adults Getting Needed Vaccinations

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WEDNESDAY, Jan. 23 (HealthDay News) -- Vaccinations aren't only for children, adults need them, too. But too few adults are getting the shots to protect them from a range of dangerous diseases, U.S. health officials said Wednesday.

"We need to get beyond the mentality that vaccines are for kids -- vaccines are for everybody," Dr. Anne Schuchat, director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, said during a teleconference. "Adults can benefit from vaccines. They can prevent serious illness and death. They can save money and help us stay healthy and at work and able to take care of our families."

Vaccinations are recommended to protect adults from chickenpox, diphtheria, hepatitis A, hepatitis B, human papillomavirus/cervical cancer, influenza, measles, meningococcal disease, mumps, pertussis (whooping cough), pneumococcal disease (pneumonia), rubella, shingles and tetanus, according to the CDC.

"Combined, these infectious diseases kill more Americans annually than either breast cancer, HIV/AIDS or traffic accidents," Dr. William Schaffner, vice president of the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases and chairman of the Vanderbilt University School of Medicine's Department of Preventive Medicine, said in a prepared statement.

"A concerted effort is needed to raise adult immunization rates," Schaffner said. "The important thing to remember is that deaths and illness associated with these infections are largely avoidable through vaccination."

But, the number of adults who've been immunized for these diseases is disappointingly low, Schuchat said.

Schuchat noted that the CDC's National Immunization Survey found that only 2.1 percent of adults 18 to 64 had been vaccinated against tetanus, diphtheria and whooping cough. And only 1.9 percent of people 60 and over had received the new vaccine for shingles, which typically strikes older adults and can cause a painful rash.

In addition, only about 10 percent of women 18 to 26 have received the new human papillomavirus to protect against cervical cancer, Schuchat said.

And, vaccination rates for influenza and pneumococcal disease (pneumonia) among the elderly are stuck at around 60 percent, well below the target rate of 90 percent.

Also troubling, according to a survey sponsored by the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases, is that "most adults don't know much about vaccines available to protect them," said Dr. Kristin L. Nichol, chief of medicine at the Minneapolis VA Medical Center and a professor of medicine and vice chair of the University of Minnesota's Department of Medicine.

Nichol said the survey also revealed that many adults aren't sufficiently concerned about these vaccine-preventable diseases. For example, 30 percent of those surveyed weren't worried about getting the flu, which kills an estimated 36,000 Americans each year.

Only 3 percent to 18 percent of those surveyed could name each of the other vaccines available for adults, Nichol said. "Only one in 10

knew there was a hepatitis vaccine, only one in 20 knew about the shingles vaccine," she said.

Nichol thinks doctors should be more proactive in recommending vaccines to their patients, since most people said they would get a vaccine if their physician recommended it.

One obstacle to getting more adults vaccinated is cost. The shingles vaccine costs around \$150, and the three-shot HPV vaccine about \$300.

Yet another report released this week -- the University of Michigan C.S. MottChildren's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health -- found flu vaccination rates among young children lower than expected across the country. The December poll found that in households with children 5 years of age and younger, only 36 percent of the youngsters had been vaccinated.

More information

To learn more about adult vaccinations, visit the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

SOURCES: Jan. 23, 2008, teleconference with Kristin L. Nichol, M.D., M.P.H., chief of medicine, Minneapolis VA Medical Center, professor of medicine and vice chair, Department of Medicine, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis; Anne Schuchat, M.D., assistant surgeon general, United States Public Health Service, director, National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta; Jan. 23, 2008, news release, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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