

Adult / Adolescent Diphtheria, Tetanus, Pertussis

Immunisation Information



The National Immunisation Program Schedule provides free diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis vaccine to Year 10 students. The vaccine is also recommended for certain groups including parents and adults working with young children.

Diphtheria

Diphtheria is caused by bacteria which are found in the mouth, throat and nose. Diphtheria causes a membrane to grow around the inside of the throat. This can make it difficult to swallow, breathe and can even lead to suffocation.

The bacteria produce a poison which can spread around the body and cause serious complications such as paralysis and heart failure. Around ten percent of people who contract diphtheria die from it.

Diphtheria can be caught through coughs and sneezes from an infected person.

Tetanus

Tetanus is caused by bacteria which are present in soils, dust and manure. The bacteria can enter the body through a wound which may be as small as a pin prick. Tetanus cannot be passed from person to person.

Tetanus is often a fatal disease which attacks the nervous system. It causes muscle spasms first felt in the neck and jaw muscles. Tetanus can lead to breathing difficulties, painful convulsions and abnormal heart rhythms.

Because of the effective vaccine, tetanus is now rare in Australia, but it still occurs in adults who have never been immunised against the disease or who have not had their booster vaccines.

Pertussis (Whooping Cough)

Pertussis is a highly contagious disease which affects the air passages and breathing. The disease causes severe coughing spasms. Between these spasms, the child gasps for breath. Coughing spasms are often followed by vomiting and the cough can last for months.

Pertussis is most serious in babies under 12 months of age and often requires admission to hospital. Pertussis can lead to complications such as haemorrhage, convulsions, pneumonia, coma, inflammation of the brain, permanent brain damage and long term lung damage. Around one in every 200 children under six months of age who catches pertussis will die.

Pertussis can be caught through coughs and sneezes from an infected person.

Protection against pertussis both from the disease and the vaccine decreases over time. Therefore a booster dose of pertussis vaccine is recommended for adolescents in Year 10 (as well as other groups in the community – see over) to reduce the incidence of pertussis circulating in the community.

Adult/adolescent diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis vaccine

The adult/adolescent diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis vaccine called Boostrix® contains a small amount of diphtheria and tetanus toxins which are modified to make them harmless, small parts of purified components of pertussis, a small amount of aluminium salt and preservative.

Boostrix® is a very effective vaccine providing 100% protection against diphtheria and tetanus and greater than 92% protection against pertussis.

Vaccine Recommendations

Boostrix® is recommended on a **single occasion** for the following groups who have previously completed a course of diphtheria-tetanus vaccine. Once a single booster dose has been given, subsequent booster doses to the same person should not be administered even if he/she qualifies for another of the groups below:

- Adolescents in Year 10 or age equivalent
- Adults before planning pregnancy or for both parents as soon as possible after birth
- Adults working with young children, especially health-care workers and child-care workers in contact with infants
- Any adult wishing to receive a dose of Boostrix® vaccine provided they have completed a course of diphtheria-tetanus vaccination

It is important to note that ***Boostrix® is only provided free to adolescents in Year 10 (or age equivalent).***

*Whilst Boostrix® is strongly recommended for the other groups outlined above, **it is not funded** and therefore needs to be purchased privately.*

Possible Side Effects of Boostrix®

This vaccine is safe and well tolerated in adolescents and adults. Most side effects are minor and quickly disappear. The following reactions are not common and if they occur, it will be soon after the immunisation. Reactions include feeling unwell, a low grade fever and soreness, redness and swelling in the area where the injection was given.

Side effects can be reduced by:

- Drinking extra fluids
- Not overdressing
- Applying a cold wet cloth to the sore injection site
- Taking paracetamol to reduce any discomfort

If reactions are severe or persistent, or if you are worried, contact your doctor or hospital.

Pre-Immunisation Checklist

Before you or your child is immunised, tell the doctor or nurse if any of the following apply:

- Are unwell on the day of immunisation (temperature over 38.5°C)
- Has had a severe reaction to any vaccine
- Is Pregnant (the person to be vaccinated)



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