Vaccinations Are Important for the People You Support

What is a vaccination?

A vaccination (also called an immunization) helps a person's body defend itself against disease. It makes the body's defenses (also called the immune system) stronger. A vaccination for a particular disease keeps a person from getting that disease.

How do immunizations work?

Vaccinations usually include a germ (a little bit of a disease). For example, a flu vaccination has some of the flu germ in it. The vaccination has just enough of the germ that a person's body can fight it off. The next time the person is exposed to that disease, their body will remember how to keep them healthy. Some vaccinations will last for a person's whole life, but others need to be given every few years.

Why are vaccinations important for people with developmental disabilities?

Vaccinations are an important part of staying healthy. For example, the flu vaccine lowers the number of people who end up in the hospital each year for respiratory illness.

During January and June of 2009, 40% of all reported special incidents for individuals in California with developmental disabilities were for unplanned hospitalizations, and of these incidents, over 30% were for respiratory illness. Vaccinations can keep people healthy and help them stay out of the hospital. It is important to know the facts about vaccinations to help the people you support prevent illness whenever possible.

Which vaccinations should people get for sure?

Doctors and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) now recommend that everyone get vaccinated for the following diseases:

- Diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis
- Measles, mumps, rubella
- Hepatitis B
- Meningitis
- Human papillomavirus (HPV; for young women and girls)
- Chickenpox (if you have not had the disease)
- Polio
- Shingles

What about the flu vaccination?

Doctors also recommend that everyone 6 months of age and older should get a flu vaccination every season. The following individuals should especially get flu vaccinations:

- People 65 years and older.
- All children 6 months through 18 years of age, especially those who are on long-term aspirin therapy.
- People who live in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities (like licensed community homes) or have a long-term illness.
- Adults with chronic heart or lung conditions, like asthma.
- Adults who needed regular medical care or were in a hospital during the previous year for illnesses like diabetes, chronic kidney disease, or a weakened immune system.
- Women who will be pregnant during the flu season.
- People who have difficulty breathing or swallowing, brain injuries, spinal cord injuries, seizure disorders, or other nerve or muscle disorders.
- Any person in close contact with someone in a high-risk group (see above).

When should people get vaccinations?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have printable schedules for both children and adults. You can find them here:

http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/schedules/index.html

You can also find a one page printable summary for adults on the DDS SafetyNet: Vaccination Guidelines for Adults - http://ddssafety.net/health/cold-and-flu/vaccination-guidelines-adults.

When should someone not get a vaccination shot?

Here are some health facts you should know when getting vaccinations. You can talk to the doctors of the people you support about these facts:

- People who have a severe allergy to eggs should not get the flu (influenza) shot or the yellow fever vaccine.
- Anyone who has had a serious allergic reaction to a vaccine should not receive that vaccine again.
- People with weak immune systems may not respond to the vaccine or they may have more side effects after they get a vaccine. Ask the doctor what's best.
- If someone is very sick with a high fever when scheduled to get a shot, it is best to wait until the fever is gone.

Are they dangerous?

There are a lot of rumors that vaccinations are dangerous. Health officials consider vaccinations very safe. Vaccinations can have side effects, but they are rarely serious. We know that:

- Side effects happen less than one in a million times.
- The positive effects of vaccinations are greater than the risks.

Mild side effects from vaccinations can include:

- Mild fever.

Soreness where the shot was given.

What are the side effects of some common vaccinations?

- Flu:
  - A small number of individuals have a mild fever. Some have soreness where the shot was given.
  - Serious allergic reactions are possible, but rare.
- Hepatitis A
  - Many people have soreness where the shot was given. Some have headaches, a loss of appetite, and are tired from 3 to 5 days afterwards.
  - If there is an allergic reaction, it will happen quickly following the shot. This reaction is very rare.
- Hepatitis B
  - Many people have soreness where the shot was given. Some have headaches, a loss of appetite, and are tired from 3 to 5 days afterwards.
  - If there is an allergic reaction, it will happen quickly following the shot. This reaction is very rare.
- Meningitis
  - Minor reactions include redness or soreness where the shot was given. Some people develop a mild fever.

You should contact a doctor right away if an individual has any mild or serious side effects.

References

Vaccines and Immunizations: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have devoted a number of pages to information about vaccines and immunizations. The site includes a number of materials that can be downloaded and printed.

http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/default.htm

Vaccine Safety: The Public Health Agency of Canada created several pages with information about vaccines and immunizations. This includes information about vaccine safety.

https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/immunization/vaccine-safety.html

This article was adapted from information found at the websites for **The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** and **The Public Health Agency of Canada**.