

# Adult Vaccination 101

June 2023



## Why are vaccinations in adults important?

While people often think of vaccinations as important for infants and children (e.g., vaccines for measles, whooping cough, etc.) there are many vaccines that we recommend for adults.

Some of the more prominent ones are the **influenza vaccine and the COVID-19 vaccine**, but there are many others. These vaccines protect against a range of conditions like pneumonia, bloodstream infection, and even some types of cancers.

## What are some key vaccinations for adults?

There are several vaccines that we recommend all adults receive. Some of them you only need to get once (it may take a few shots though) and others you need to receive regularly (e.g., once a year as with influenza). We will go through these vaccines on this information sheet, but **to find out more information you should speak to your pharmacist, family doctor, or public health nurse to learn more about vaccination.**

## Vaccinations you need annually (or more frequently)

Generally speaking, there are two vaccines you need to take regularly as an adult. These vaccines are for **influenza** and **COVID-19**.

### Influenza (flu) Vaccine

- **What does it protect against:** Influenza is one of the leading causes of hospitalization in Canada. Every year, tens of thousands of Canadians are hospitalized and thousands die from influenza. It is **not the same as the common cold**.
- **Who should get the vaccine:** Everyone **6 months and older** should receive the influenza vaccine every year in the fall as the type of influenza virus that circulates changes each year.
- **What vaccines are available:** There are different types of influenza vaccines - for the most part those under 65 receive one type of vaccine and those **older than 65 receive a stronger type of vaccine** (e.g., high-dose vaccine) due to their higher risk of severe outcomes.

### COVID-19 Vaccine

- **What does it protect against:** COVID-19 is something we are all familiar with, but it remains the leading cause of hospitalization in Canada. At any given time, thousands of Canadians are hospitalized for COVID-19 so it is still a very serious disease.
- **Who should get the vaccine:** Everyone **6 months and older**. There are different recommendations for **booster doses** depending on how old you are, your medical conditions, and where you live.
- **What vaccines are available:** We generally use **bivalent mRNA vaccines** for COVID-19, which have been proven to be **very safe and effective**. New guidance will be soon available on **fall boosters for later in 2023**.

### Did You Know?

*Vaccination is important for adults, not just children*

### Did You Know?

*You can speak to your pharmacist or family doctor about vaccination*

### Did You Know?

*Some vaccines you need only once, but others you need every year*

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## Vaccinations you only need to take once a lifetime

There are several vaccines that only need to be taken once a lifetime. These vaccines generally do not require boosters, or if they do, very few of them. Examples of these vaccines include the following:

### ***Shingles Vaccine:***

- ***What does it protect against:*** Shingles is a very painful, debilitating rash that can appear out-of-the-blue from reactivation of the chickenpox virus. It can lead to further complications like post-herpetic neuralgia that are very difficult to treat. **1 in 3 Canadians will develop shingles** in their lifetime.
- ***Who should get the vaccine:*** Everyone **50 years and older** and those who are younger with immune-compromising conditions.
- ***What vaccines are available:*** We use the recombinant zoster vaccine, known as Shingrix, is given in 2 doses at least 2 months apart and is highly effective and safe.

### ***Pneumococcal Vaccine***

- ***What does it protect against:*** This vaccine protects against pneumococcal bacteria, a leading cause of pneumonia, meningitis, and bloodstream infection in Canada.
- ***Who should get the vaccine:*** Everyone **65 years and older** and those who are younger with comorbidities like lung or heart disease and immune-compromising conditions.
- ***What vaccines are available:*** There is a **conjugate pneumococcal vaccine** called Prevnar-20 that is highly effective against the illness and generates a strong immune response. There is also a polysaccharide pneumococcal vaccine called Pneumovax that is used but is less effective than the conjugate vaccine.

### ***Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Vaccine***

- ***What does it protect against:*** This vaccine protects against HPV (a sexually transmitted infection) which causes cervical cancer in women and head and neck cancer in both men and women. It is a **cancer-preventing vaccine**.
- ***Who should get the vaccine:*** This vaccine is offered in middle school / junior high, but many adults, especially men, missed it in school as it is relatively new. It is **recommended for all adults**, with no upper age limit.
- ***What vaccines are available:*** We use the HPV vaccine known as Gardasil, which is >95% effective and given as a 2-dose or 3-dose series depending on your age.

## Where do I get vaccinated? Where do I find out more?

You can find out more about vaccinations from your **family doctor, pharmacist, or public health**. Some of these vaccines are paid for by the government while others will be covered by private insurance if you have it.

In Alberta, you can contact public health at 811 to get vaccines that are publicly paid for. Otherwise, your best bet is to go to your pharmacist or family doctor for vaccination.