

A Rising Concern: Why Aren't Adults Getting Vaccines?

All too often, the discussion on vaccines is centered solely on children. Certainly, the importance of childhood immunizations should not be diminished, but what about adults?

Unvaccinated adults are not only at risk themselves, but they also pose a threat to those more vulnerable for infection, such as the elderly and children. Despite this ripple-effect threat, adult vaccination rates remain dismally low, according to data from National Health Interview Survey (NHIS). The barrier to higher vaccination use among adults centers on education; physicians are often unsure how to best purchase vaccines, and have a difficult time tracking their patients' immunization schedules, and patients, similarly, are confused as to why it matters, what they need to do, and when they need to do it.

The numbers tell a troubling story. According to NHIS data from 2013, adoption of most vaccines for adults above the age of 19 remained flat, as much improvement is needed. Modest gains were seen for the Tdap, Shingles, and HPV vaccines. However, even with the gains, fewer than 18% of adults ages 19 to 64 received the Tdap vaccine, less than 25% of adults ages 60 and above received Shingles vaccination, and only 40% of women and 6% of males between ages 19 to 26 reported at least one dose of the HPV vaccine. Given the advancements and innovations in our nation's healthcare system, these are particularly alarming figures.

The message from this data is that better practices are necessary to ensure adult patients are receiving the appropriate vaccinations, and physicians must play an integral role in helping us get there. Overcoming the large gap in adult vaccine coverage will not be an easy task, but there are meaningful tactics that can be implemented immediately:

- **Stay Up-to-Date** – Recommended vaccination schedules continue to evolve as medicine advances. The [CDC's website](#) provides an easy-to-read version updated to include the most recent schedule released in February 2015.
- **Participate in a Vaccine Buying Group** – In many cases, physicians are not confident that they can efficiently, effectively and profitably provide immunizations to their adult patients. Such practices would benefit by joining a buying group that has expertise working with Family Physicians, Internists, and Women's Health Providers.
- **Communicate** – Why shouldn't asking about vaccines be as common as checking a patient's blood pressure or discussing their medications? Start today and ask your patients about the vaccines they have received, consult patient records, educate them on the approved vaccine schedule, and, together, determine whether they are appropriate for certain immunizations.

As healthcare shifts from focusing on curing sick patients to keeping people healthy, physicians can strengthen their practices and lead the way by proactively managing their patients' vaccination needs.

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