

Stats4Vax Talk Track for School Nurses

There are several health issues that teens face today, so it can be difficult to prioritize what to discuss with them during office visits or consultations. There is one topic that can be, and should be, part of every conversation—vaccination.

As you know, too many teens are under-vaccinated against serious infectious diseases like meningococcal meningitis and human papillomavirus (HPV).^{1,2} School nurses play an instrumental role in reminding teens and their parents/guardians the importance of immunization to help keep teens healthy.

This document provides suggested guidance on how to talk to teens—specifically those 16-17 years old—about vaccination, and encourage them to talk to their health care provider to see that they are up-to-date on their immunizations.

Tips to Help Build Vaccination into Your Discussion w/ Teens

Any visit is a good opportunity for you to remind 16- and 17-year-olds about the importance of vaccination. Just a two-minute conversation can encourage them to talk to their parent/guardians, which can result in a visit to their health care provider.

Here are some questions to help kick-start the conversation:

- Have you received any vaccinations in the past couple of years? Do you know which ones?
- Do you know which vaccines you should have received as an adolescent?
- Do you know what vaccines do and why they are important?
- Do you know if you have any upcoming appointments with your health care provider?

National vaccination rates tell us that most teens have not received all four Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)-recommended immunizations,^{1,2} so use this as an opportunity to educate those who are unaware or misinformed about what teens and parents/guardians need to know.

- The CDC recommends that teens receive at least four vaccines to help protect them against serious infectious diseases that could potentially lead to negative health effects or even death.³
- These vaccines include:
 - Meningococcal meningitis vaccine (MenACWY, MenB)
 - Meningococcal meningitis is a rare but serious disease that develops rapidly and can claim a life in as little as one day.⁴ Of those who survive, approximately one in five are left with serious medical problems like amputation, deafness, and brain damage.⁵ Teens are at increased risk of meningitis. This risk may be due to activities like sharing utensils and kissing.^{6,7}
 - To help protect against meningococcal meningitis, and because protection from the vaccine can wear off within five years, children should receive the MenACWY vaccine at age 11 or 12 years and get a second dose at age 16.⁸

- The CDC recommends MenB (serogroup B meningococcal vaccine) for certain adolescents at increased risk, e.g., students on college campuses that have recently experienced meningococcal B outbreaks.⁹
- Human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine
 - HPV can cause various cancers in both boys and girls.¹⁰ To help protect against HPV infection, a CDC committee of experts on immunization voted to recommend a two-dose series *if* the first dose is received before age 15. If the first dose is given before age 15, then the CDC recommends two doses of HPV vaccine at least six months apart. Teens and young adults who start the series later, at ages 15 through 26, are recommended to receive three doses to help protect against cancer-causing HPV infection.¹¹ While the HPV vaccine is recommended for boys and girls at age 11 or 12 years so they are vaccinated before ever being exposed to HPV, teens who are not yet vaccinated should be.¹²
- Tetanus, diphtheria and acellular pertussis (Tdap) vaccine
 - Tetanus causes painful tightening of the muscles usually all over your body; diphtheria causes a thick covering in the back of the throat and can lead to breathing problems, paralysis, heart failure and even death; and pertussis is a disease that can lead to coughing spells, pneumonia, seizures, brain damage, and death, particularly in infants.^{13,14}
 - At age 11 or 12, preteens should get one Tdap shot, since protection from the DTaP vaccine they received as children wears off.¹⁵
- Influenza (flu) vaccine
 - Flu can lead to fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, fatigue and more. Serious outcomes include hospitalization and even death.^{16,17}
 - Persons 6 months of age and older, including preteens and teens, should get the flu vaccine every year, ideally by the end of October. Vaccination after October should not be considered too late since flu activity can continue through January or even later.¹⁶
- Vaccination is key to helping protect you against these very serious infectious diseases.
- Did you know that the CDC now recommends a 16-year-old visit with a health care provider as included in their new vaccination schedule?¹⁸ This means that older adolescents should have a routine visit to check in with their primary medical care provider about health concerns, including vaccination.
- Will you talk to your parents/guardians to see if you are up-to-date on your immunizations? And if you're not, will you encourage them to make an appointment with their medical provider?

Myths about vaccines continue to spread, resulting in misinformed concern about safety and side effects. Some of your students may ask questions regarding some of the things they've heard, so the below can help address any inquiries you receive from both teens and parents/guardians:

1. I hear that vaccines cause autism. Is that true?

Vaccines do not cause autism.¹⁹ This debate started when a study—which has since been retracted—linked autism to the Measles, Mumps, Rubella vaccine. Following publication, an independent panel reviewed the study and found it was flawed. In fact, the panel said the author of the study conducted it in a way that was “dishonest, irresponsible and misleading.”²⁰ In addition, there have been multiple studies that have shown no link between vaccination and autism.¹⁹ I encourage you to talk to your health care provider, who can speak more about the safety of vaccines.

2. Vaccines have negative side effects.

Vaccines are very safe. Most vaccine side effects are usually minor and temporary, such as soreness at the site of injection or mild fever. The CDC, World Health Organization (WHO) and other health organizations all agree that vaccines are the best defense we have against serious, preventable, and sometimes deadly diseases.^{21,22}

3. Can someone actually get the disease from a vaccine?

Almost never. The CDC says that with an inactivated vaccine, it isn't possible. Dead viruses or bacteria can't cause disease. And with live vaccines, such as those that help protect against measles and chickenpox, it sometimes can seem like a mild case of disease is appearing, but this is actually showing that the vaccine is working.²³

4. Vaccines are not necessary, particularly if you maintain good hygiene.

If people are not vaccinated, diseases that have become uncommon such as polio and measles can quickly reappear in a community. Yes, good hygiene is important and can help protect people from infectious diseases, but many infections can spread regardless of how clean we are.²⁴

Close your two-minute conversation with a handout that captures everything you just discussed. The "Letter Home to Parents/Guardians," also available in the Stats4Vax Resource Library, serves as a nice takeaway to remind teens to talk to their parents/guardians when they get home.

- Bring this letter home to your parent/guardian—it provides all the information we just went over.
- And for more information, tell your parent/guardian to visit the CDC's website, which has a whole section dedicated to teen vaccination at <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/who/teens/index.html>.

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