

# Tetanus, Diphtheria and acellular Pertussis (Tdap) Vaccine

## Public Health – Factsheet

Immunization has saved more lives in Canada in the last 50 years than any other medical intervention.<sup>1</sup> Vaccines help your immune system to recognize and fight bacteria and viruses that cause disease.

### What is the Tdap Vaccine?

The Tdap vaccine protects against three different diseases. All three of these diseases can cause serious infection and can sometimes be fatal.

1. **Tetanus**, often called “lockjaw,” is caused by a toxin released by bacteria. Tetanus infections cause painful tightening of the muscles (spasms). Tetanus infections can be difficult to treat and often deadly if the breathing muscles are affected.
2. **Diphtheria** is caused by bacteria that can make a thick covering (membrane) in the back of the nose and throat, which can lead to breathing problems. These bacteria can also produce a harmful toxin (poison) that can cause paralysis and heart failure.
3. **Pertussis**, often called “whooping cough,” is also caused by bacteria. Whooping cough causes long coughing spells that make it hard for infants and children to eat, drink, or even breathe.

### How are these diseases spread?

Tetanus does not spread from person to person. Tetanus spores live in dirt, dust and manure. When there is a cut or burn on the skin, spores can get into the body and cause infection.

Diphtheria and whooping cough can be spread from person to person by coughing, sneezing, or sharing food or drinks. Diphtheria sometimes causes skin sores, and contact with these sores can also spread infection.

### Why should people get the Tdap vaccine?

Immunization is the best way to protect against tetanus, diphtheria and whooping cough.

When you are immunized, you also help protect others because someone who is immunized is less likely to spread infection.

### Who should get the Tdap vaccine?

The Tdap vaccine increases the protection that people should already have from their routine childhood immunizations. All adolescents should get one “booster” dose of Tdap at 14 to 16 years of age.

Individuals who missed the vaccine when it was offered in grade 8 or 9 and were born during or after 1989 should get their Tdap booster.

Adults who are due for a tetanus/diphtheria (Td) booster, and/or are primary caregivers of newborn infants, and have never had an acellular pertussis vaccine should also get the Tdap vaccine.

Infants and children under the age of four need different vaccines to protect against these diseases. For more information, speak to your public health nurse, pharmacist or doctor.

### Who should NOT get the Tdap vaccine?

Anyone who has had a serious reaction to a previous dose of any vaccine, or has any severe allergies should speak with a public health nurse, pharmacist or doctor before getting the Tdap vaccine.

People should not get immunized if they have a high fever. But they can still get the Tdap vaccine if they have a mild illness, like a cold.

<sup>1</sup> Public Health Agency of Canada

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## Possible side-effects of the Tdap vaccine

Vaccines are known to be very safe. It is much safer to get the vaccine than to get tetanus, diphtheria, or whooping cough.

Common reactions to the vaccine include soreness, redness and swelling where the vaccine was given. Some people may have fever, drowsiness, dizziness, or an upset stomach. These are mild reactions and usually last one to two days. Acetaminophen (Tylenol® or Temptra®) can be given for fever or soreness.

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**ASA (Aspirin®) should NEVER be given to children because it can cause a severe liver and brain disease called Reye's Syndrome.**

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It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine because there is a rare possibility of a severe allergic reaction. This can include hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. If this happens after you leave the clinic, **call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department for immediate treatment.**

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**Report any serious or unexpected side-effects to a public health nurse, pharmacist or doctor.**

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It has been suggested that there may be an association between tetanus vaccines and Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS), which is a form of paralysis that is usually temporary. However, people who are not immunized can also get GBS, and no evidence has been found for an increased risk of GBS with the Tdap vaccine.

## Your record of protection

Make sure your doctor, pharmacist or public health nurse updates your own, or your child's, immunization record card, after you receive an immunization. Keep the card in a safe place!

Information about the immunizations you or your children receive may be recorded in the provincial immunization registry. This computerized database allows your immunization provider, and your child's immunization provider, to find out what immunizations you and your child have had or need to have. Information collected in the provincial immunization registry may be used to produce immunization records, or notify you or your immunization provider if someone has missed a particular immunization. Manitoba Health, Healthy Living and Seniors may use the information to monitor how well different vaccines work in preventing disease. If you need information on the immunizations that you or your child has received, contact your immunization provider.

## For more information on the Tdap vaccine:

Talk to your doctor, pharmacist or public health nurse.

Call Health Links – Info Santé in Winnipeg at 204-788-8200; toll-free elsewhere in Manitoba 1-888-315-9257.

Or visit:

**Manitoba Public Health website**

[www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/index.html](http://www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/index.html)

**Public Health Agency of Canada website**

[www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/im/index-eng.php](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/im/index-eng.php)

**Canadian Pediatric Society website**

[www.cps.ca/](http://www.cps.ca/)