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# Tetanus-Diphtheria-Pertussis (Tdap) Vaccine Program Questions and Answers for Parents and Caregivers

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This fact sheet provides basic information for parents and caregivers. It is not intended to provide or take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always talk to a health care professional about any health concerns you may have before you make any changes to your current diet, lifestyle or treatment.

Immunization is one of the most effective ways to protect yourself and your family against vaccine-preventable diseases.

The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care is introducing one lifetime dose of the pertussis (whooping cough) vaccine (Tdap) for adults to the *Publicly Funded Immunization Schedules for Ontario*.

## What is tetanus (lock jaw)?

Tetanus is a serious disease that may happen if dirt with the tetanus germ gets into a cut in the skin. Tetanus germs are found everywhere, usually in soil, dust and manure. It does not spread from person to person. Tetanus causes cramping of the muscles in the neck, arms, legs and stomach. It may also cause painful convulsions which may be severe enough to break bones. Even with early treatment, tetanus kills two out of every 10 people who get it.

## What is diphtheria?

Diphtheria is a serious disease of the nose, throat and skin. It causes sore throat, fever and chills. It may also cause more serious complications such as breathing problems, heart failure and nerve damage. Diphtheria kills about one out of every 10 people who get the disease. It is most often passed to others through coughing and sneezing. As a result of high vaccination rates, there have been no cases of diphtheria in Ontario since 1995.

## What is pertussis (whooping cough)?

Pertussis is a common disease that causes prolonged cough illness in adolescents and adults. Pertussis is particularly serious in infants. This cough can cause a person to vomit or stop breathing for a short period of time. The cough can last for weeks and make it hard to

eat, drink or even breathe. Pertussis can cause serious complications such as pneumonia. Pertussis can also cause brain damage and seizures, especially in babies.

Pertussis spreads very easily from an infected person to others through coughing or sneezing. Adults have been increasingly recognized as the main source for pertussis infection in infants and young children. Infected adults and adolescents can pass on the disease to infants who have not yet completed their immunization series against pertussis. These infants will not be fully protected against pertussis and are at greater risk of serious complications.

## How well does the Tdap vaccine protect against tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis?

The acellular pertussis vaccine was introduced in 1997 to replace the whole-cell pertussis vaccine to better protect children from pertussis disease. Immunity with the whole-cell pertussis vaccine decreases over time, leaving some people susceptible to pertussis in adolescence or adulthood.

It is estimated that the Tdap vaccine will offer full protection against tetanus, over 95 per cent against diphtheria and 85 per cent against pertussis when it is given as a booster dose in adolescence. In some cases individuals may acquire the infection after vaccination, but generally disease symptoms are milder.

## Who is eligible to receive the publicly funded vaccine?

In Ontario, adolescents 14 to 16 years of age (with eligibility until 18 years of age) are eligible to receive the Tdap vaccine. All adults 19 to 64 years of age who have never received the Tdap vaccine in adolescence are now eligible to receive **one lifetime** (publicly funded) dose of the vaccine. This lifetime dose replaces one of the Td booster doses given every 10 years.

Parents, grandparents or other adult household contacts of newborns, infants and young children as well as health care workers are considered a priority to receive the Tdap vaccine.

## Who should not get the Tdap vaccine?

Individuals should not get the vaccine if they have:

- a serious allergic reaction to a previous dose of a vaccine containing diphtheria, tetanus or pertussis;
- a history of an allergic reaction to any part of the vaccine, including aluminum phosphate (adjuvant), 2-phenoxyethanol (preservative);
- a history of encephalopathy (a disease of the brain) of undetermined cause within seven days of administration of a vaccine with pertussis components;
- a history of progressive or unstable neurological conditions; or
- a history of Guillian-Barré syndrome (GBS) within eight weeks of getting a tetanus vaccine dose.

Please consult with your health care provider if you:

- have a severe infection with a fever higher than 38°C; or
- are pregnant.

## Is the Tdap vaccine safe?

Yes. Side effects of the Tdap vaccine are usually mild and last for only a few days after getting the vaccine. The most common side effect is pain at the injection site. Redness and swelling may occur and a small number of people may have fever, vomiting, headache, diarrhea, nausea, chills, generalized body ache, decreased energy or sore and swollen joints after receiving the vaccine.

Allergic and other severe reactions are very rare.

There is no risk of a pregnant woman or anyone else catching any disease from someone who has been recently vaccinated.

**You should always discuss the benefits and risks of any vaccine with your health care provider.**

## When should I call my health care provider?

Call your health care provider or go to the nearest emergency department if any of the following reactions develop within three days of receiving the vaccine:

- hives;
- swelling of the face or mouth;
- trouble breathing;
- very pale colour and serious drowsiness;
- high fever (over 40°C);
- convulsions or seizures; or
- other serious symptoms (e.g., paraesthesia).

## Who should I talk to if I have any more questions about the Tdap vaccine?

Talk to your health care provider or call your local public health unit for more information.

## How should my immunization be recorded?

After receiving a vaccine, make sure your personal immunization record (i.e., the "Yellow Card") is updated. Keep it in a safe place!