

Minnesota Department of Health

# Tdap Vaccine: What Teens Need to Know

What is Tdap?

Tdap is a combination of three vaccines that protect against tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis (also called whooping cough).

**Tetanus**, also called lockjaw, is a disease caused by bacteria that affects the body's muscles and nerves.

**Diphtheria** is a respiratory disease caused by bacteria that can cause the breathing tube to be blocked.

**Pertussis**, or whooping cough, is a persistent cough illness. Anyone of any age can get pertussis.

How are these diseases spread?

**Tetanus** bacteria are found in soil and can enter the body through cuts and scratches or open wounds. Tetanus cannot be spread from person to person.

**Diphtheria** and **pertussis** are spread through droplets produced during coughing or sneezing. These droplets don't travel very far through the air and usually only infect persons within an arms length.

What are the symptoms of these diseases?

**Tetanus** includes muscle spasms in the jaw, difficulty swallowing, and stiffness or pain in the muscles of the neck, shoulders, or back. The spasms can spread to the muscles of the abdomen, upper arms, and thighs.

**Diphtheria** includes gradual onset of a sore throat and low-grade fever. It can lead to breathing problems, heart failure, and even death.

**Pertussis** is similar to a cold with a cough at first. After a week or two, the cough worsens and begins to occur in sudden, uncontrollable bursts. Persons with pertussis may seem well between coughing spells, which may continue for several weeks or months. Vomiting can occur following coughing.

How can these diseases be prevented?

The best way to prevent tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis is to be vaccinated. Tetanus, diphtheria, acellular pertussis (Tdap) is a new vaccine for adolescents and adults that protects against these diseases.

What should I know about the Tdap vaccine?

Tdap is given in place of one of the Td booster shots to add protection against pertussis. Like the Td shot, your arm may be sore.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends that:

- Adolescents 11-12 years old get a booster dose of Tdap (instead of Td).
- Adolescents 13-19 years old should talk to their provider about getting the Tdap shot.

How can I learn more about the Tdap vaccine and the diseases it prevents? Ask your student health service or your healthcare provider.

Call your local health department's immunization program or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): 1-800-232-4636 (1-800-CDC-INFO).

Visit the following sites:

- Minnesota Department of Health  
[www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/diseases/pertussis/dtap.html](http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/diseases/pertussis/dtap.html)
- Immunization Action Coalition  
[www.immunize.org/vis/vis\\_tdap.asp](http://www.immunize.org/vis/vis_tdap.asp)
- CDC Vaccines and Preventable Diseases  
[www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/vpd-list.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/vpd-list.htm)

What are other vaccines I should know about?

There are other vaccines you should consider, including a meningococcal vaccine and, for girls, a human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine. Talk to your healthcare provider about these.



Immunization Program  
P.O. Box 64975  
St. Paul, MN 55164-0975  
651-201-35503 or 1-800-657-3970  
[www.health.state.mn.us/immunize](http://www.health.state.mn.us/immunize)