

Winter Stewardship

Immunizations

Shots – no one likes them to be sure but they are essential to keeping you healthy. There some immunizations you should get this year. This article will explain what and why you might need a particular immunization and where to find them. Some of the myths about immunizations will also be discussed.

Which immunizations you should receive depend on a few things such as your age, health status and exposure risks to disease. For most adults a yearly influenza or “flu” shot is a good plan. Another immunization to keep current is the tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis shot (also called TdaP). For those over 50 the shingles shot is recommended. If you are over 60 you need to get the pneumonia shot.

Influenza is a serious respiratory problem that can lead to pneumonia, sinusitis and ear infections. These complications are most serious for people with heart disease, lung problems such as asthma and those with diabetes. The influenza shot is an inactivated virus that protects you about from 2 weeks after the injection and continues to protect you for about 6 months after, generally covering the influenza season. The flu shot has 3 different strains of influenza, those thought to be most likely to cause the flu for that year. The flu shot does not cover colds or the stomach virus.

The TdaP shot is recommended every 10 years or when you have a dirty puncture wound. Since the fall of 2009 pertussis or Whooping Cough has been epidemic, requiring schools to insist students be immunized. Should you get the TdaP? If you work or take care of small children less than 2 years old, have school age children, have asthma, or it has been more than 3 years since your last tetanus shot you should get a TdaP.

The chicken pox virus that causes shingles never goes away. It lies dormant in the nervous system and can become activated when you are under stress. Shingles are a painful outbreak of blisters that occur on one side of the body. You can get shingles more than once in your life. The

shingles shot is about 85% effective in preventing shingles and should you have an outbreak you are less likely to have lingering pain.

Where can you find these immunizations? Your doctor should have these immunizations available. Other places include your local pharmacy, the county health department and community health clinics. The cost of some immunizations may be covered by your insurance. Flu shots are \$20-25 and the Tdap is \$15-25. Shingles and pneumonia shots are generally covered by your insurance.

There are many myths and misconceptions about immunizations. No, you will not come down with the flu if you get the flu shot. Vaccines do not have harmful side effects. The British physician who started the rumor about thimerosal causing autism in children who got the measles, mumps, rubella shot lost his license to practice this past year for falsifying his data. Vaccine preventable diseases have not been eliminated in this or any other country.

In conclusion, there is no reason to fear keeping your immunizations up to date. You may not like getting shots, no one does, but they can keep you from becoming ill or dying. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has a great web site with lots of information about vaccines, travel and safety. The CDC web address is: <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/>