

MS Essentials Tips



VACCINATION & MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Vaccinations enable people to develop immunity against many viruses and bacteria, which can prevent the development of many serious, potentially life-threatening diseases. A vaccination program is usually started during childhood, but adults will need periodic booster shots to maintain their immunity. Table 1 lists the recommended vaccination schedule for adults.

Recommendations for people with MS

- 1 **Make sure your vaccinations are up-to-date.** Many of the medications used to treat MS can make you more susceptible to infections, so you will need the added protection of full immunization. Do not get any vaccine if you have an infection or fever.
- 2 **Get vaccinated before you start your MS medication.** Live/attenuated vaccines should generally **not** be administered if you are taking an MS therapy. This includes vaccines for measles, mumps, rubella, chickenpox, shingles (herpes zoster), rotavirus, yellow fever, and influenza (nasal spray only). If you require any of these vaccines, they should be taken at least 6 weeks before you begin your course of treatment for MS.
- 3 **Most people with MS should get vaccinated against influenza every year.** This is because influenza can worsen the symptoms of MS. The flu vaccine is not a live vaccine and can be taken while on an MS medication.
- 4 **Consider getting vaccinated against pneumonia.** This is recommended for older individuals, and people with chronic respiratory disease (e.g. asthma, COPD).
- 5 **Inform your doctor if you had chickenpox during childhood or adolescence.** If you are unsure about whether you have immunity against chickenpox, you will need to have a blood test to check your immune status. If you have not been previously exposed to chickenpox, vaccination is recommended before starting treatment with some MS medications. Allow 4-6 weeks after the last vaccine injection before starting treatment with one of these medications.
- 6 **Talk to your neurologist or MS clinic nurse if you are planning to become pregnant.** If you stop your MS medication because of pregnancy, it's a good time to consider updating any required vaccinations. Talk to your family doctor or obstetrician about any vaccinations you may need during your pregnancy.
- 7 **Inform your doctor that you are taking an MS medication before you receive a vaccine.** We can't always predict the vaccinations we'll need (e.g. for travel). So talk to your doctor if you learn that a vaccine is needed. You may need to interrupt your MS treatment for a few months while you are being vaccinated.

Table 1. Routine vaccinations during adulthood

Other vaccines you may need

VACCINE*	HOW OFTEN	VACCINE*	HOW OFTEN
Tetanus and diphtheria (Td)	Every 10 years	Hepatitis A and B	1 course (multiple doses may be needed)
Pertussis (whooping cough) (Tdap for tetanus/diphtheria/pertussis)	1 dose in adulthood	HPV (human papillomavirus)	1 dose at age 26 years or younger
Influenza	Every year	Meningitis	1 dose at age 24 years or younger
Shingles (herpes zoster)	1 dose after age 60 years	Varicella (chickenpox)	1 dose
Pneumonia	1 dose after age 65 years	Travel vaccines** (e.g. cholera, rabies, typhoid, yellow fever)	As needed depending on the country you are visiting
Measles, mumps and rubella	1 dose in adulthood		

*See Health Canada's Canadian Immunization Guide is available at www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/canadian-immunization-guide.html information.

**See the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Guide for Travelers at www.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/list