Tetanus, Diphtheria, and Pertussis: Diseases and Vaccines
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Tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis are very serious diseases that can be prevented by a vaccine. When pregnant women receive the Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, acellular pertussis) vaccine, it protects their babies from pertussis.

What is tetanus?
• Tetanus is a disease caused by cuts or wounds that get infected with tetanus bacteria, often found in dirt. It is also called lockjaw.
• Tetanus bacteria make a poison that causes your muscles to spasm (contract or convulse on their own).
• Tetanus can be life-threatening.

What is diphtheria?
• Diphtheria is a serious, highly contagious disease caused by bacteria. One in 10 people who get diphtheria will die of the disease.
• Symptoms:
  › nose and throat infection that may affect breathing
  › skin infection
  › heart failure
  › paralysis (not being able to move)

What is pertussis?
• Pertussis is a disease caused by bacteria. It is also called whooping cough.
• Babies less than one year old are most severely affected by pertussis.
• Symptoms may last from 6 to 12 weeks. They include:
  › severe coughing that may affect breathing
  › skin infection
  › pneumonia (lung infection)
  › seizures
• Pertussis can cause death.

What is Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, acellular pertussis) vaccine?
• Tdap vaccine is used to prevent tetanus, diphtheria, and acellular pertussis.
• Getting immunized with the Tdap vaccine is the best way to prevent tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis. The Tdap vaccine includes vaccines for all 3 diseases in one shot.
• The vaccine is injected into the muscle with a needle.

Who should get the Tdap vaccine?
The Nova Scotia Immunization Schedule recommends that this vaccine be given to:
• Grade 7 students, as part of the School Immunization Program.
• Adults older than 18 and:
  › who have not had a dose of acellular pertussis vaccine after high school
  › who need a tetanus vaccine and who have not yet received a pertussis-containing vaccine in adulthood: 1 dose
• Pregnant women during every pregnancy, to protect their baby from pertussis. Babies are at the highest risk for severe, life-threatening complications from pertussis.

**Caution**
Check with your health care provider before getting this vaccine if:
› Your immune system is weak because of disease or certain medications.
› You have a bleeding disorder or are taking blood-thinning medications.

**Who should NOT get the Tdap vaccine?**
The following people should not get the Tdap vaccine:
• People who may have immune system problems because of a medical condition or medications.
• People who have had a serious allergic reaction (e.g., swelling of the face or lips, trouble breathing, a drop in blood pressure) to a previous dose, or any part of the Tdap vaccine. If you or your child has had a previous serious allergic reaction to a part of the vaccine, talk with your health care provider about getting immunized by a specialist in a clinic that can control severe reactions.
• People who are sick or have a fever (temperature of 39.5° C/103° F or higher).

**What happens after getting the Tdap vaccine?**
• Stay in the clinic for at least 15 minutes in case of any reactions. As with any vaccine, there is a slight chance that you may have a more serious reaction.

**What are the possible side effects of the Tdap vaccine?**
• Common side effects include redness, swelling, and pain at the injection site.
• Other, less common, side effects include fever, mild headache, diarrhea, nausea (feeling sick to your stomach), chills, body aches, less energy, and sore or swollen joints.
Make sure you have acetaminophen or ibuprofen at home in case you or your child has a fever. Follow the instructions on the container. You should not take these medications if you have certain medical conditions. Talk with your health care provider about your medical history before using either of these medications.

**What are the possible risks of the Tdap vaccine?**
Some people faint before, during, or after immunization. If you usually faint with immunizations, tell your health care provider before being immunized. Sitting or lying down for 15 minutes after immunization can help prevent fainting, and injuries caused by a fall. Tell your health care provider right away if you feel dizzy, or have vision changes, or ringing in your ears.
Call your health care provider if:
- You or your child have a fever for more than 24 hours.
- You or your child have a temperature of 39.5°C/103°F or higher.
- Your or your child’s fever does not get better after taking acetaminophen or ibuprofen.
- You or your child have seizures.
- You or your child have other symptoms.

If you think the person who got the vaccine is having a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis), call 911 right away.

What will happen if I have a severe allergic reaction?
Severe allergic reactions to Tdap vaccine are rare. If needed, your health care provider can give you epinephrine (“epi pen”) and will then call 911. Symptoms of a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis):
- itchy skin or hives
- sneezing
- stuffy nose
- watery eyes
- coughing or wheezing
- swelling of the face and throat
- flushed skin
- trouble breathing
- cramps or vomiting (throwing up)
- a fast heartbeat
- dizziness or weakness

Symptoms usually start a few minutes after immunization, but may start up to a few hours after immunization.

Questions?
If you have any questions about tetanus, diphtheria, or pertussis, or the Tdap vaccine, please call Public Health (see list of offices here: www.nshealth.ca/public-health-offices), or your health care provider.

For more info on immunization, including the benefits and risks, visit:
- Immunize Canada: www.immunize.ca/diseases-vaccines; www.immunize.ca/parents
- Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca
- Canadian Paediatric Society: www.cps.ca
- Immunization Action Coalition: www.immunize.org/handouts/discussing-vaccines-parents.asp
- 811: https://811.novascotia.ca

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The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.