

Vaccinations aren't just for kids, expert says

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A new school year means more than new clothes, new books and a new grade level – it also means new shots for millions of public school children.

“Many parents get in the rhythm of having their child vaccinated every few months as infants and even annually as a family for the flu,” said Dr. Jorge Parada, director of infection prevention and control at Loyola University Health System. “Getting regular shots for preventive medicine is a good life lesson to learn, right along with the alphabet and arithmetic.”

Primary-care physicians receive updated immunization charts each year. Many also have the required documentation forms needed to provide with schools. Public schools are usually required to receive documentation on required vaccinations for each child no later than one month after school starts.

Grade School Basics

“Parents need to remember that almost every one of the required or recommended vaccines comes as a series of shots, to assure that the child builds sufficient immunity to the various infections. Even the first season’s flu shot for a child less than 9 years old requires two doses, and then a single yearly dose,” said Dr. Andrew Bonwit, who specializes in pediatric infectious diseases at Loyola. Hepatitis A, hepatitis B, polio, measles, mumps, rubella and varicella are all available as a series. “If a child falls behind the standard schedule, his or her pediatrician can plan

a catch-up schedule based on standard recommendations,” Bonwit said.

College Students

“The flu, meningitis and HPV are important vaccinations for college-age adults,” Parada said. The human papillomavirus (HPV) is recommended for women and men, ages 26 or younger, to prevent genital warts and cancer. “Awareness has been raised for HPV for women, but it is important to know that there is one brand that can be given to men,” he said. HPV vaccine is given in three doses over six months.

For Adults

The school calendar can also be a good time for all adults to annually safeguard their health. “Flu shots are available as early as Sept. 1, making it a good time to check the charts at your physician’s office,” Parada said. “If you smoke, a pneumonia vaccination is recommended and your physician can advise you on shots based on your health, age and lifestyle.”

Financial Coverage

Insurance coverage of recommended vaccinations varies by provider and plan.

“Subsidized or even free vaccinations are available for those who qualify, so there is no financial reason to not get vaccines,” Parada said. Students may legally opt out of vaccinations if they are allergic, or for religious reasons.

Final Thought

“We see some potentially severe, vaccine-preventable illnesses every

year, such as whooping cough (pertussis)," Bonwit said. "Vaccinations protect children from potentially dangerous illnesses and can keep them from needing to be hospitalized."

Vaccines serve two purposes, Parada said. "First, they help to keep you protected from catching an illness; and second, they help prevent the illness. Remember that something you don't have, you can't pass along to another," Parada said. "So, be smart, be safe, be vaccinated."

For those confused about which [vaccinations](#) to get and when, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention offers easy-to-understand charts by age on their Web site at cdc.gov/vaccines

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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