

Too few adults get recommended vaccines, CDC says

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They not only protect the recipient, but also offer 'herd immunity,' experts say.

(HealthDay)—Vaccines aren't just for kids, and most American adults aren't getting their recommended vaccinations, federal health officials said Tuesday.

"In general, too few [adults](#) are taking advantage of the protection of vaccines, leaving themselves and those around them at greater risk of vaccine-preventable diseases," Dr. Howard Koh, assistant secretary for health at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, said during a news conference.

For example, Koh said, in 2011, the most recent year for which data are available, there were some 37,000 cases of preventable pneumococcal pneumonia that resulted in 4,000 deaths.

The majority of deaths occurred among adults 50 and older, and the highest rates were seen among those 65 years and older. Almost everyone who gets [invasive pneumococcal disease](#) needs treatment in the hospital, and that's why people 65 and older should be vaccinated, Koh said.

Dr. Carolyn Bridges, associate director for adult immunization at the U.S. [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)'s Immunization Services Division, said the number of adults "getting their recommended vaccines is still too low, despite modest gains for Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis) and HPV (human papillomavirus)."

For example, she said, about 62 percent of adults 65 and over have received the [pneumococcal vaccine](#), which protects against sometimes life-threatening meningitis, pneumonia and [blood infections](#). As with most vaccines, most of those vaccinated are white, she noted, with blacks, Asians and Hispanics lagging behind.

About 13 percent of adults reported getting a tetanus vaccination, which was a 4 percent increase since 2010, Bridges said. But "that's well below where we would like to see them," she added.

"We have initial data that over 9,300 cases of pertussis (whooping cough) have been seen in adults in 2012 and nearly 42,000 cases in total, and that's the highest number we've seen in this country in a single year since 1955," Koh said.

Through Jan. 5, there had been 18 deaths from whooping cough, most of which involved infants younger than 3 months, Koh said. Most of these babies got the disease from an adult in the home, he said.

Adults, especially those who are around children and pregnant women, should get a Tdap vaccination, Bridges said.

Only about 36 percent of U.S. adults at high risk for hepatitis B have been vaccinated, and only 13 percent have been vaccinated against hepatitis A, she said.

The number of women 19 to 26 who have been vaccinated against the [human papillomavirus](#), which protects against cervical cancer and other diseases caused by the virus, has been increasing and is now at almost 30 percent, according to the report.

The CDC recommends that women get three doses of the HPV vaccine by the time they're 26, Bridges said. "Ideally, this vaccine should be given during adolescence," she said.

The last recommended adult vaccine is the herpes zoster vaccine, which protects people from shingles, caused by the same virus that causes chickenpox. In 2011, almost 16 percent of adults 60 and older reported getting the vaccine, which was about the same as in 2010, Bridges said.

Koh said that under the Affordable Care Act, people who enroll in health plans after 2010 can get vaccinations with no co-payments or deductibles.

To increase the number of adults getting vaccinated, the CDC recommends that doctors keep track of a patient's vaccinations and make it a routine part of a checkup.

The vaccines findings were published Jan. 29 in the CDC's *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*.

Dr. Marc Siegel, an associate professor of medicine at NYU Langone Medical Center in New York City, said, "We have emerging diseases out there—some of them are recurrent, like [whooping cough](#) and HPV, and they're epidemics."

The low vaccination rates against these diseases is proof that many people don't understand basic facts about vaccines, he said. First, you can't get the disease from the vaccine. Also, there are myths that vaccinations can cause harm, he added.

"The reason to get a [vaccine](#) is herd immunity," Siegel said. Vaccinations not only protect the person who is vaccinated, but as more people are vaccinated it decreases the amount of circulating germs, he said.

Siegel said both smallpox and polio were eradicated by vaccinations.

More information: For more on adult vaccinations, visit the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

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