

Your Vaccine Recommendation is a Critical Factor in Protecting Patient Health

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Patients trust you to give them the best counsel on how to protect their health. You know that immunization is an important preventive measure – but it's unlikely that getting vaccinated is on the radar for your adult patients. Your strong recommendation is critical in ensuring that they get the vaccines they need to help them stay healthy.

Vaccine-preventable diseases are serious. Every year, tens of thousands of adult Americans suffer serious health problems, are hospitalized, and even die from diseases that could be prevented by vaccines. These diseases include shingles, influenza, pneumococcal disease, hepatitis A, hepatitis B-related chronic liver disease and liver cancer, Human papillomavirus (HPV)-related cancers and genital warts, pertussis (whooping cough), tetanus and more.

Adults are not getting the vaccines they need. Adult vaccination coverage rates for the majority of vaccines are well below 50 percent. In Michigan, only 46.7 percent of 19-64 year olds have received one or more doses of Tdap vaccine and 24.3 percent of individuals 60 years of age and older have received one or more doses of zoster vaccine.

Vaccination protects vulnerable individuals. Vaccination is important because it not only protects the person receiving the vaccine, but also helps prevent the spread of certain diseases, especially to those that are most vulnerable to serious complications, such as infants and young children, the elderly, and those with weakened immune systems. Cancer patients and their caregivers should be appropriately immunized in order to shield these vulnerable individuals from serious illness. Immunizing adults creates healthier communities and protects the places in which we live, work, and play.

Most adults don't realize that they need vaccines. Adult clients may be recommended up to 13 vaccines. A recent national survey revealed that most adults were not aware of recommended vaccines beyond influenza.

Your patients are likely to get the vaccines you recommend to them. Clinicians are the most valued and trusted source of health information for adults. Your patients rely on you to let them know which vaccines are necessary and right for them.

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) is calling on all healthcare professionals to make adult immunizations a standard of routine patient care in their practice by integrating four key steps:

1. **ASSESS immunization status of all your patients at every clinical encounter.** This involves staying informed about the latest Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations for immunization of adults and implementing protocols to ensure that patients' vaccination needs are routinely reviewed.
2. **Strongly RECOMMEND vaccines that patients need.** Key components of this include tailoring the recommendation for the patient, explaining the benefits of vaccination and potential costs of getting the diseases they protect against, and addressing patient questions and concerns in clear and understandable language.
3. **ADMINISTER needed vaccines or REFER your patients to a provider who can immunize them.** It may not be possible to stock all vaccines in your office, so refer your patients to other known immunization providers in the area to ensure that they get the vaccines they need to protect their health.

Coordinating a strong immunization referral network will reduce a substantial burden on your adult patients and your practice. If your adult patients do not have insurance, or if their insurance does not cover any of the cost of an immunization, check with your local health department to see if your patient qualifies for publicly-purchased vaccines.

4. **DOCUMENT vaccines received by your patients.** Help your office, your patients, and your patients' other providers know which vaccines they have had by documenting in the Michigan Care Improvement Registry (MCIR). And for the vaccines you do not stock, follow up to confirm that patients received recommended vaccines.

Keep your patients and their caregivers healthy by recommending timely and appropriate adult immunizations. Also, make sure the staff in your office are doing their part to protect vulnerable patients by being vaccinated themselves. To find out more, visit www.cdc.gov/vaccines or www.aimtoolkit.org.