

Access to Vaccines is Key to Healthy Aging



Vaccination Contributes To Healthy Aging...

Staying up to date on all vaccinations is important to reduce the risk of infectious diseases.¹ As we age, vaccines protect us and preserve our health, especially if we have chronic conditions like heart or lung disease and diabetes. A bout of the flu or pneumonia can result in setbacks in a patient's overall health in terms of blood pressure, A1C levels, and pulmonary function.

Vaccinations can help reduce the risk of exacerbating underlying conditions that can result in disability and death. For example, influenza vaccines have been shown to reduce stroke and heart attack risk by about 34%.^{2,3} New studies show that routine vaccination may also help protect against developing diseases like Alzheimer's later in life.⁴

...And Protects Against Severe Illness and Death

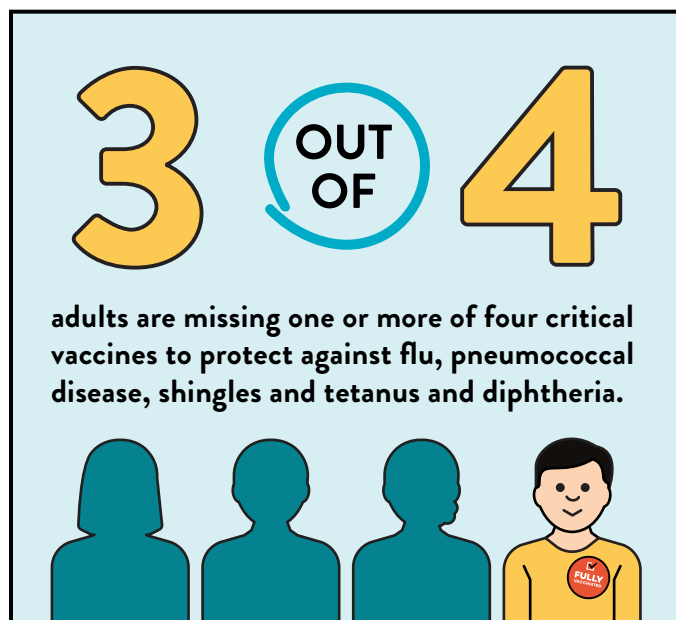
Vaccines are not only one of the most effective methods of preventing disease, but they help people live longer, healthier lives. Vaccines protect against severe illness, disability, and death from more than 15 different infectious diseases in adults such as influenza (flu), pneumococcal disease, herpes zoster (shingles), hepatitis A, hepatitis B, HPV-related cancers, tetanus, and pertussis (whooping cough).⁵

Despite the importance of vaccinations for older adults, adult vaccination rates remain low. Additionally, from 2020-2021, adults missed more than 37 million recommended vaccines, and many have yet to catch up.⁶

Prioritize Vaccinations to Enhance Long-Term Health Outcomes

Adults need to be protected when their risk for morbidity and mortality from infectious disease begins to increase, leading to improved health outcomes later in life. The US Preventive Services Task Force and CDC Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices recommend preventive services to support health and wellness at every age, including vaccinations, cancer screenings, and regular check-ups.

Adopting these preventive health strategies earlier can help more adults age in good health and increase their quality of life. Similarly, other screenings are recommended for preventive health at certain ages, for example, breast cancer screening is now recommended for women aged 40 and older, and prostate cancer screening starting at age 50.



Ensuring Adults 50+ Have Access to Vaccines

Many factors can contribute to lower vaccination rates, including not knowing which vaccines to receive when, limited access to care, and health insurance coverage. Vaccination recommendations require planning and consultation with your health care provider. For example, some recommendations are based on health status and recommendations begin at different ages – some at age 50, others at 60, or 65. There are different doses and frequencies for vaccination.

Not fully understanding the vaccine schedule may contribute to low uptake. Only around 20% of adults aged 19 years and older are up to date on their vaccinations.^{7,8} Location can also have impact on access to vaccines. Adults in assisted living or skilled nursing facility are at even higher risk for some diseases because of the congregate setting as well as increased frailty/health conditions.

Underserved communities are disproportionately affected when it comes to receiving recommended vaccines, which can exacerbate negative health outcomes later in life. For example, compared to other racial/ethnic groups, Black Americans are diagnosed with chronic conditions like heart disease and diabetes 5-10 years earlier than the general population. This increases their risk for certain infectious diseases. Furthermore, there are an estimated 25 million Americans—or about 8% of the population—who are currently uninsured, limiting their access to protection from a range of vaccine-preventable conditions.⁹

What Policymakers Can Do

- ◆ **Expand vaccine access:** Ensure every person over 50 years old, no matter who they are or where they live, has access to vaccines to keep them healthy – especially older people and people with chronic conditions who are vulnerable to serious risks from preventable diseases.
- ◆ **Ensure all providers can vaccinate:** Ensure the full health care provider landscape, including physicians, nurses, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, pharmacists, medical and pharmacy technicians at various locations, can provide vaccinations to their patients.
- ◆ **Improve provider education:** Offer providers a clear understanding of the immunization schedule and the tools and resources they need to make a strong recommendation to vaccinate.
- ◆ **Address health disparities:** Account for population differences across communities and cultures when formulating policies and recommendations to help address health disparities.

About AVAC

The Adult Vaccine Access Coalition (AVAC) was formed to advocate for federal policies that improve access to and increase utilization of vaccines among adults. Near universal access to immunizations for children has been one of the greatest public health accomplishments of the 20th century. AVAC seeks to achieve the same level of success when it comes to immunizations among adults. Our coalition is made up of stakeholder organizations which work collaboratively every day to inform and engage federal policymakers in working towards common legislative and regulatory solutions that will strengthen our adult immunization ecosystem.

www.adultvaccinesnow.org

REFERENCES

- 1 Allen et al. 2020. Available [here](#).
- 2 CDC. 2018. Available [here](#).
- 3 Behrouzi et al. 2022. Available [here](#).
- 4 Harris et al. 2023. Available [here](#).
- 5 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4486398/>
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- 7 Elekwachi et al. 2021. Available [here](#).
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- 9 ODPHP. Available [here](#).

Healthy Aging Platform

The Healthy Aging Platform helps to develop and maintain healthy aging practices throughout the lifespan, including disease prevention, early detection services and supports.

