

Script – Print – Get Your (Other) Vaccines On COVID-19 is Just One Important Vaccine for Adults

In the past year, there's been plenty of talk about the importance of a COVID-19 vaccine, and rightly so. Vaccines are one of the most effective ways to prevent numerous diseases. And while the spotlight shines brightly these days on COVID-19, there are many other significant vaccines that people should have on their radar as well.

All adults need vaccines. Which ones you need may depend, however, on your age, health history or travel habits. Vaccines have certainly proven effective; according to the World Health Organization (WHO), polio cases have decreased by more than 99% since 1988. WHO also estimates vaccines prevent two to three million deaths each year. For example, the worldwide rate of measles deaths dropped by 86% between 2000 and 2016.

“Vaccines have really helped with infectious disease,” says Dr. Leonardo Lopez, chief medical officer for OSF HealthCare Saint Paul Medical Center in Mendota. “It was breakthrough medicine when it came out. It changed the lives and outcomes for millions of people – we basically eradicated polio. Of course, there are different vaccines and their effectiveness vary. Vaccines don't always necessarily eradicate the disease completely but many times it does lower the incidence of mortality, so less people die from that disease – maybe not prevent that disease completely, but manage the disease so the health of the community is much improved.”

According to Dr. Lopez, vaccines teach the body to recognize new diseases. The vaccine uses a substance that helps your body build up antibodies and other defenses to a virus or bacteria. It helps immune cells to remember the types of antigens that cause infection, which allows for a quicker response to the disease down the road.

“Vaccines are very helpful,” says Dr. Lopez. “They're like wearing a seatbelt. It doesn't mean you're not going to get into a crash and it doesn't mean you won't get injuries from a crash, but it definitely improves your chances of doing well after a crash. The same goes for a vaccine. It improves your chances of minimizing the disease and the severity of the disease.”

There are a number of vaccines available for adults, including those that help prevent shingles, pneumonia, meningitis, and HPV. There is also the COVID-19 vaccine, tetanus and the influenza vaccine, which helps prevent the flu and is recommended to be scheduled every fall or early winter. Which vaccines you need may depend on your age and health history.

With any vaccine comes possible side effects. That includes pain and swelling at the injection site; fever, fatigue and muscle weakness. Side effects can last from hours to days, if they happen at all.

Like with anything else, there is plenty of solid information and misinformation available on the subject of vaccines. Dr. Lopez says the best resource for accurate information, however, is your physician.

“One of the best things to do is to talk to your physician,” he says. “It’s good to read different things and I encourage you to do that. Sometimes it can be confusing what you read but come with that information, ask specific questions and have your physician guide you through those questions.”

The greatest risk of not getting vaccinated is the possibility of getting sick after being exposed to a disease. The illness may be much worse than the possible side effects of the vaccine and could even result in death.

“The most important way to get protection from a vaccine is to actually get the vaccine,” says Dr. Lopez. “The sooner you get it the sooner you’re protected, and that’s my main message. Even if you get two vaccines (flu and COVID) together, get them because the sooner you do the sooner your protection starts.”

For more information, visit [OSF HealthCare](#).