



Patient education: Vaccines for adults with HIV (The Basics)

Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate

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Should people with HIV get vaccines?

Yes. Vaccines are especially important for people with HIV. That's because people with HIV are at higher risk of infections than other people, and vaccines help prevent infections.

There are different types of vaccines. "Inactivated vaccines" are vaccines that contain dead copies of a virus. "Live attenuated vaccines" are vaccines that contain live but weakened copies of a virus. Most vaccines are safe and appropriate for people with HIV.

Which inactivated vaccines should I get?

If you have HIV, ask your doctor which vaccines you need.

Adults with HIV usually need the following vaccines:

- **Flu vaccine** – The flu can cause fever, chills, muscle aches, cough, or sore throat. The flu vaccine is also called the "influenza vaccine," or the "flu shot." People with HIV should get this vaccine every year.
- **COVID-19 vaccine** – Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is an infection caused by a virus called SARS-CoV-2. It can cause a fever, cough, and trouble breathing, along with other symptoms. Some people get severely ill from COVID-19. People with HIV should get a COVID-19 vaccine as soon as they are able.
- **Pneumococcal vaccine** – Pneumococcus is a germ that can cause an infection of the lungs, ears, blood, or tissues around the brain. The "pneumococcal vaccine" is sometimes called

the pneumonia vaccine. There are 2 types of pneumococcal vaccines. Adults with HIV should get one of each type of vaccine. They should get additional doses of 1 of the types of pneumococcal vaccines as they get older.

- Diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis vaccines – Diphtheria can cause a thick covering in the back of the throat that can lead to breathing problems. Tetanus causes the muscles to work abnormally. Pertussis, also called "whooping cough," is an infection that causes a severe cough. People with HIV should get vaccines against these 3 infections, if they didn't get it as a child. After that, they should get booster vaccines against diphtheria and tetanus, which also come in a single shot.
- Human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine – HPV is a virus that can cause genital warts and some forms of cancer. People with HIV who are 26 years old or younger should get this vaccine if they have not already had it. In some cases, doctors suggest that older people with HIV get the HPV vaccine, too.
- Hepatitis A and B vaccines – The hepatitis A and B viruses both cause a serious form of liver disease. People with HIV should get both vaccines. These can be given separately or as a combined vaccine.
- Meningococcus vaccine – Meningococcus is a germ that can cause a serious body-wide infection of the blood or an infection called meningitis, which affects the tissues around the brain. There are 2 types of the meningococcus vaccine. All adults with HIV should get 1 type of this vaccine. Some people with HIV should get the second type of vaccine, too.

The meningococcus vaccine is especially important for men who have sex with men, if they live in or travel to a city that has had a meningitis outbreak (such as New York City).

- Shingles vaccine – Shingles is caused by a virus called varicella-zoster virus. It can cause a painful skin rash and blisters. There are 2 shingles vaccines that are available for adults over 50 years. People with HIV should get the inactivated (not live) vaccine.

Which live vaccines should I get?

If you have HIV, there are certain live vaccines you can get. But you can only get them if your T cell counts are above 200. (T cells are a type of cell in the immune system. HIV lowers the number of T cells in your body.)

Most adults only need live vaccines in certain situations, like if they did not receive a vaccine as a child if they plan to travel.

What if I want to travel?

If you want to travel, you will need to check with your doctor about which vaccines you might need based on where you are going. Most travel vaccines are safe for people with HIV, especially if their T cell counts are above 200.

What if I want to get pregnant?

If you want to get pregnant, talk to your doctor before you start trying. There are certain vaccines that you will need to have before you get pregnant.

Which side effects should I expect?

Most of the vaccines listed above cause soreness in the arm that usually lasts about a day. Side effects in people with HIV are similar to those in people without HIV.

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