

Diphtheria, Tetanus, Acellular Pertussis (dTap) Vaccine

Get protected, get immunized.

- Vaccines make your immune system stronger. They build antibodies to help prevent diseases.
- Immunization is safe. It is much safer to get immunized than to get these diseases.

What is the dTap vaccine?

This vaccine gets its name from the diseases it protects against: diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis (whooping cough).

What is diphtheria?

Diphtheria is a nose and throat infection caused by bacteria. It spreads by coughing, sneezing, or having close contact with someone who has diphtheria. It can cause trouble breathing or swallowing, heart failure, and paralysis (not being able to move all or part of your body).

Up to 1 out of 10 people who get diphtheria will die. In children under 5 years and adults older than 40 years, 2 to 4 out of 10 people who get diphtheria can die.

What is tetanus?

Tetanus is a bacterial infection that causes uncontrolled movements (spasms) in the muscles of the jaw and other muscles of the body. Tetanus bacteria are common in dirt, dust, manure (animal stool used as fertilizer), and human stool. They can get into the body through a cut on the skin or an animal bite.

Tetanus can cause:

- “lock jaw” where the mouth stays closed and cannot open widely
- trouble swallowing and breathing, seizures, and death

About 1 to 8 out of 10 people who get tetanus and are not immunized can die. Babies and older adults are most at risk.

Tetanus infection is rare because there has been a vaccine since the 1940s. Most people have been immunized against it.

What is pertussis?

Pertussis is an infection of the airways and lungs caused by bacteria. It spreads by coughing, sneezing, or having contact with someone who is infected. Pertussis can cause:

- a cough that can last for several weeks to months, sometimes ending with choking or vomiting
- problems with eating, drinking, and breathing (especially for babies)
- pneumonia (a type of lung infection)

In rare cases pertussis can lead to seizures, brain injury, and death.

Who should get the dTap vaccine?

Grade 9 students can get the dTap vaccine as part of the school immunization program. Younger children may also get this vaccine if they are at least age 7 years and:

- They are not up to date with their diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis immunizations.
- They cut or poke themselves with something dirty.

If you are an adult, you should have this vaccine if:

- You have never been immunized for diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis.
- It has been 10 years since your last dose.
- You cut or poke yourself with something dirty (depending on when your last dose was).
- You will be in close contact with a baby and you have never had a dose of pertussis vaccine as an adult.
- You are pregnant (even if it has been less than 10 years since your last dose).

In Alberta, the dTap vaccine is recommended in every pregnancy. It helps protect your baby during the first few months of life, especially against pertussis. It is best if you get the dTap vaccine when you are between 27 and 32 weeks pregnant. If you are outside of this time, talk to your healthcare provider because you may also get this vaccine earlier or later in your pregnancy.

How many doses do I need?

If you had your routine immunizations on schedule, you need an extra dose (booster) of dTap at the following times:

- in Grade 9 (If your child already had a dose when they were at least age 12 years, they do not need a dose in Grade 9.)
- every 10 years as an adult
- during each pregnancy

If you are getting immunized for diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis for the first time, you need 3 doses.

How well does the vaccine work?

If you are healthy and get all of the recommended doses, the protection is:

- almost 100% for diphtheria and tetanus
- around 90% for pertussis

It is important to get booster doses because the protection may weaken over time.

Where can I get the dTap vaccine?

Grade 9 students can get the vaccine in school. Parents and guardians will get an information package that includes a consent form. If you want your child to get the vaccine in school, you must complete and sign the consent form and return it according to the instructions provided.

Children and adults can also get the dTap vaccine at your local public health or community health centre.

If you are pregnant, you can also get the dTap vaccine at a pharmacy. Some doctor's offices also give the vaccine.

If you are at risk for tetanus after an injury or wound, you can get the dTap vaccine at an urgent care centre, emergency department, doctor's office, or walk-in clinic.

Are there side effects from the dTap vaccine?

There can be side effects from the dTap vaccine, but they tend to be mild and go away in a few days. Side effects may include:

- redness, swelling, or feeling sore where you had the needle
- feeling tired or unwell, or getting upset easily
- a headache
- feeling dizzy
- a fever or chills
- body aches or sore joints
- not feeling hungry or not wanting to eat (poor appetite)
- feeling sick to your stomach (nausea), vomiting (throwing up), or loose stool (diarrhea)
- a rash
- swollen lymph nodes

At least 1 out of 100 people who got this vaccine reported 1 or more of these side effects. In some cases, it is unknown if the vaccine caused these side effects.

It is important to stay at the clinic for 15 minutes after your vaccine. Some people may have a rare but serious allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. If anaphylaxis happens, you will get medicine to treat the symptoms.

It is rare to have a serious side effect after a vaccine. Call Health Link at 811 to report any serious or unusual side effects.

How can I manage side effects?

- To help with soreness and swelling, put a cool, wet cloth over the area where you had the needle.
- There is medicine to help with a fever or pain. Check with your doctor or pharmacist if you are not sure what medicine or dose to take. Follow the directions on the package.
- Some people with health problems, such as a weak immune system, must call their doctor if they get a fever. If you have been told to do this, call your doctor even if you think the fever is from the vaccine.

Who should not get the dTap vaccine?

You may not be able to get this vaccine if:

- You have an allergy to any part of the vaccine.
- You had a severe (serious) or unusual side effect after this vaccine or one like it.

If you have allergies or have had a side effect from this vaccine, check with your doctor or a public health nurse before you get the vaccine.

Although you can get the vaccine if you have a mild illness such as a cold or fever, you should stay home until you are feeling better to prevent spreading your illness to others.

I have a fear of needles. How can I prepare for my immunization?

Many adults and children are afraid of needles. You can do many things before, during, and after immunization to be more comfortable.



Scan the QR code, visit ahs.ca/vaccinecomfort, or call Health Link at 811 for information.

For more information about immunization



Call Health Link at **811**



Scan the QR code or go to ahs.ca/immunize