

Frequently Asked Questions

I'm confused about the various vaccines that contain tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis. Can you explain?

There are two basic products that can be used in children younger than age 7 years (DTaP and DT) and two that can be used in older children and adults (Td and Tdap). Some people get confused between DTaP and Tdap and others get confused between DT and Td. Here's a hint to help you remember. The pediatric formulations usually have 3-5 times as much of the diphtheria component than what is in the adult formulation. This is indicated by an upper-case "D" for the pediatric formulation (i.e., DTaP, DT) and a lower case "d" for the adult formulation (Tdap, Td). The amount of tetanus toxoid in each of the products is equivalent, so it remains an upper-case "T."

Please summarize the 2007 recommendations for the use of Tdap vaccine in pre-teens and teens.

Give a 1-time Tdap dose to adolescents age 11–12 years if 5 years have elapsed since last dose DTaP; then boost every 10 years with Td. Give a 1-time dose of Tdap to all adolescents who have not received previous Tdap. Special efforts should be made to give Tdap to persons age 11 years and older who are 1) in contact with infants younger than age 12m and/or 2) healthcare workers with direct patient contact.

Short intervals between Td and Tdap: Tdap can be administered at an interval of less than 10 years since the last dose of Td to protect against pertussis. The safety of intervals as short as approximately 2 years between administration of Td and Tdap is supported by a Canadian study of children and adolescents; shorter intervals may be used. There is no minimum interval between Td and Tdap.

Incomplete or unknown vaccination history: patients 11-years-old and older who have never received tetanus and diphtheria toxoid-containing vaccine should receive a series of three vaccinations. The preferred schedule is a single dose of Tdap followed by Td at least 4 weeks later and a second dose of Td 6–12 months after the previous dose. Tdap can substitute for Td for any one of the 3 doses in the series.

Should I make an effort to give teenagers a Tdap dose, even if they've had a dose of Td at age 11-12 years?

Yes. All adolescents should receive one dose of Tdap vaccine to protect them from pertussis, even if they have already received Td. It is important to do this right away if they are in contact with an infant younger than age 12 months, work in a health-care setting where they have direct contact with patients, or live in a community where pertussis is occurring.

What is the difference between the two Tdap products - Boostrix® and Adacel®?

Both of these vaccines provide protection against pertussis, tetanus, and diphtheria. Boostrix® (GlaxoSmithKline) is licensed for persons ages 10-64 years, and Adacel® (Sanofi Pasteur) is licensed for persons ages 11-64 years. Both are approved for one dose only, not multiple doses in a series. The two vaccines also contain a different number of pertussis antigens and different concentrations of pertussis antigen and diphtheria toxoid.

We have a 13-year-old patient who was given DT (pediatric) as a preschooler after she had experienced excessive crying following a dose of DTP. Now, we are wondering if we can give her Tdap since we know she may not be protected against pertussis.

Yes, you can. Many of the precautions to DTaP (e.g., temperature of 105°F or higher, collapse or shock-like state, persistent crying lasting 3 hours or longer, seizure with or without fever) do not apply to Tdap. This issue is discussed in CDC's Tdap recommendations, available at www.cdc.gov/mmwr/PDF/rr/rr5503.pdf

What if we mistakenly gave Tdap to a child ages 7-9 years?

Use of Tdap in children ages 7-9 years is considered off-label and is not recommended; however, the dose can be counted and does not need to be repeated with Td.

Can Tdap be given at the same visit as other vaccines?

Yes. Tdap can be administered with all other vaccines that are indicated (e.g., meningococcal conjugate vaccine, hepatitis B vaccine, influenza, and the second dose of MMR and/or Varicella.) Each vaccine should be administered at a different anatomic site using a separate syringe.

How many doses of Tdap can we give to a patient?

The vaccine is licensed for just one dose for those ages 10 through 64 years, depending on the age range of the product used. Subsequent doses, as well as vaccine given to children 7-9 years and adults ages 65 years and older, should be Td.

Someone in our clinic gave DTaP to a 50-year-old instead of Tdap. How should this be handled?

The DTaP recipient received the appropriate amount of tetanus toxoid and MORE diphtheria toxoid and pertussis antigen than is recommended. Count the dose, but take measures to prevent this error in the future.

Storage and Handling

Tdap vaccines must be stored at 35° to 46°F (2° to 8°C). They should not be frozen or exposed to freezing temperatures.

Contraindications and Precautions to Tdap Vaccination

Tdap has two contraindications and four precautions. The contraindications are (1) anaphylactic reaction to a prior dose of the vaccine or any of its components and (2) encephalopathy within 7 days of a previous dose of DTaP or DTP; in this case, give Td instead of Tdap. The precautions are (1) moderate or severe acute illness; (2) history of an Arthus reaction following a previous dose of a tetanus-containing and/or diphtheria toxoid-containing vaccine, including meningococcal conjugate vaccine; (3) Guillain-Barre Syndrome (GBS) 6 weeks or sooner after a previous dose of tetanus-toxoid containing vaccine; and (4) progressive or unstable neurological disorder, uncontrolled seizures or progressive encephalopathy until a treatment regimen has been established and the condition has stabilized. CDC has recently issued an excellent publication, Guide to Vaccine Contraindications and Precautions. To access it, go to www.cdc.gov/vaccines/recs/vac-admin/downloads/contraindications-guide-508.pdf