

## **Vaccines best defense against preventing disease, Darnall medical professionals encourage everyone to get their shots**

By Patricia Deal  
CRDAMC Public Affairs

FORT HOOD, Texas—Vaccines have reduced or eliminated many infectious diseases in the U.S. that once routinely killed or harmed many infants, children, and adults. The average life span of Americans has increased by more than thirty years in large part because of vaccines.

Because vaccines have saved so many lives, the medical professionals at Carl R. Darnall Army Medical Center encourage everyone to remain diligent about immunizations as tens of thousands of people in the United States still die from vaccine-preventable diseases every year, per the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

“It is always better to prevent a disease than to treat it. Vaccines prevent disease in the people who get the vaccine, and protect they those who come into contact with unvaccinated individuals. Vaccines save lives, period,” said Col. (Dr.) Mark Croley, chief of Pediatrics at CRDAMC.

Immunizations are especially critical for children. A child born in the U.S. today can now be protected against 17 serious diseases and conditions through immunization.

Parents have many misconceptions of vaccines, Croley added, that may impact their decision to have their child immunized.

“Knowledge is key. Make sure you get factual information from a qualified medical professional who can dispel the myths,” he said.

Vaccines do have side effects, Croley added, but mostly they are temporary and minor. He is adamant that the benefits of immunizations far outweigh the risks.

“There are very few absolute reasons not to get shots. It is a medical decision that is highly recommended, safe and effective and carries minimal risk with potentially great gain,” he stated.

“Combination vaccines make it even easier to protect children. They provide maximum protection with the fewest number of shots. Some vaccines can be taken orally, too,” Croley said.

Croley stated that it’s important to know which shots are needed and when to get them so parents should check with their provider or school district.

The general guidelines per the CDC, is that young children under age 6 get a series of shots to protect against measles, polio, chicken pox, and hepatitis. All 11- and 12-year-olds need shots to help protect against tetanus, diphtheria, whooping cough, and meningitis. It is recommended that girls also get the HPV (human papillomavirus) vaccine to protect against the most common cause of cervical cancer.

Through the military health care system, vaccination records are kept electronically so patients have access wherever they go.

“If you don’t have a record or there’s any doubt as to if your child has had a particular vaccine, it’s best to redo the immunization,” Croley suggested “It’s perfectly safe to re-dose. Plus, we do have tests that can determine what antibodies are in your system.”

While getting all the children vaccinated is important, the immunization mission doesn’t end there.

“Most adults put themselves at needless risk of disease by failing to get key vaccinations as adults. They only think they need the flu shot, but, like children, adults need routine immunizations,” said Lt. Col. (Dr.) Soo Kim-Delio, chief of the Allergy/Immunization Clinic at Thomas Moore Clinic.

Some adults incorrectly assume that the vaccines they received as children will protect them for the rest of their lives, according to a survey from the CDC. However, medical evidence shows that immunity can begin to fade over time and as adults age, they become more susceptible to serious disease caused by common infections such as the flu, pneumococcus, and shingles.

“There have been several important changes to adult vaccine recommendations recently. Of note, adults 65 years and older who have close contact with an infant aged less than 12 months should get vaccinated with DTaP (combined diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis vaccines) due to the risk of

transmitting pertussis or whooping cough, a highly contagious disease,” Kim-Delio stated. “Even if patients are not around infants, adults 65 years and older should receive DTaP. While DTaP is already approved for use in patients 11-64 years old as a onetime booster, it can be administered regardless of interval, since current shots will have the latest tetanus or diphtheria-containing vaccine.”

All adults who do not have an immunity to varicella (chickenpox) should receive two doses of the vaccine if not previously vaccinated, or a second dose if they have received only one dose in their lifetime, according to Kim-Delio, unless there is a medical reason not to have the vaccine.

“When we think of chickenpox, we usually think of kids with the classic rash, but adolescents and adults are actually more at risk for this severe disease. Complications include bacterial infection of the skin, swelling of the brain, and pneumonia,” she stated.

Another important immunization for adults is the zoster (shingles) vaccine, which is recommended for adults 60 years and older regardless of whether they report a previous episode of herpes zoster. Persons with chronic medical conditions may be vaccinated unless they are likely to have an adverse reaction.

“Recently, the shingles vaccine was approved down to 50 years of age. While the CDC has not changed its vaccine recommendation at this time, the immunization Clinic at Thomas Moore Clinic is offering this vaccine to all patients 50 and over who qualify,” Kim-Delio added.

In addition to routine immunizations for children and adults, Croley and Kim-Delio advise anyone traveling out of country to make sure they get the proper vaccinations recommended or required for that particular country.

While most infectious diseases have been eliminated or eradicated in the U.S., it is not uncommon to have outbreaks of measles, whooping cough, chickenpox or other diseases when vaccination rates drop. Children that are not fully vaccinated can become seriously sick and spread it through a community.

“There have been some spikes in measles cases in the U.S. recently. Just about all the outbreaks were sparked by people bringing it here from other countries,” Croley said. “Again, that’s why it’s so important to be diligent about immunizations.”

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Cadet Rebecca Case, a student in the Army Nurse Summer Training Program prepared vaccines to give to elementary and high school students during the Carl R. Darnall Army Medical Center School Physicals and Immunization Clinic held July 30 at Thomas Moore Health Clinic at Fort Hood, Texas. The School Physicals and Immunizations clinics, held two weekends in late summer, give parents an opportunity to get their children up-to-date on required immunizations for the upcoming school year. The next weekend clinic is scheduled for Aug. 13 from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. at TMHC. (Photo by Jeri Chappelle, CRDAMC Public Affairs)

**teenimmunization.jpg**

Registered nurse Seleta McCoy, from Carl R. Darnall Army Medical Center's Family Medicine Residency Clinic, vaccinates Aric Austin, 14, during the CRDAMC School Physicals and Immunization Clinic held July 30 at Thomas Moore Health Clinic at Fort Hood, Texas. The School Physicals and Immunizations clinics, held two weekends in late summer, give parents an opportunity to get their children up-to-date on required immunizations for the upcoming school year. The next weekend clinic is scheduled for Aug. 13 from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. at TMHC. (Photo by Jeri Chappelle, CRDAMC Public Affairs)

**teengirlimmunization.jpg** Registered nurse 2nd Lt. Rebeccah Collins vaccinates Alexia Woods, 12, for chicken pox and meningitis during the Carl R. Darnall Army Medical Center School Physicals and Immunization Clinic held July 30 at Thomas Moore Health Clinic at Fort Hood, Texas. The School Physicals and Immunizations clinics, held two weekends in late summer, give parents an opportunity to get their children up-to-date on required immunizations for the upcoming school year. The next weekend clinic is scheduled for Aug. 13 from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. at TMHC. (Photo by Jeri Chappelle, CRDAMC Public Affairs)