

# Adult Vaccines: Raising Awareness, Improving Access (new ACSH reports)

By ACSH Staff — November 11, 2009

New York, NY -- November 12, 2009. The current "swine flu" problem is a reminder that the U.S. pays too little attention to the important broader issue of [Adult Immunization](#) [1] -- and that too few adults are getting the shots they need, even though most kids are getting theirs. Scientists associated with the American Council on Science and Health (ACSH) have researched and written a thorough, comprehensive report on this largely-neglected topic, available in three formats:

☛ [Adult Immunization: The Need for Enhanced Utilization](#) [2] by Steven Marks has been peer-reviewed by experts selected from among the nation's leading authorities on immunization, immunology, virology, and vaccines.

☛ It has also been condensed into the layperson-friendly booklet [Adult Immunization: Getting the Shots You Need](#) [3].

☛ ACSH also offers the small brochure [Adult Immunization: What's the Story?](#) [4], for widespread dissemination.

Although vaccination is acknowledged to be one of the most cost-effective public health strategies available to prevent many communicable viral and bacterial infections, large numbers of Americans above the age of 18 remain vulnerable to vaccine-preventable diseases (VPDs). Over 90% of children receive most recommended vaccines, but generally low rates of coverage are the norm for adults.

For example, only 10% of women in the target population of 18 to 26 years have been vaccinated against human papilloma virus (HPV), a major cause of cervical cancer. The rate is not much higher for tetanus and diphtheria shots; only 44% of American adults have been vaccinated. Even for influenza, the illness for which the value of immunization is best recognized by the public, and which annually takes the lives of over 30,000 Americans, coverage is erratic.

☛ Vaccine-preventable diseases cause substantial sickness and death and contribute to excess healthcare spending for medical treatment and hospitalizations.

☛ Nearly 50,000 adults die each year from one of the ten most common VPDs.

☛ More than 6 million young women are infected annually with HPV, and more than 1 million older Americans every year get shingles.

☛ Furthermore, the direct and indirect costs of an average seasonal outbreak of influenza alone are estimated to be close to \$10 billion and \$87 billion, respectively.

Despite the ready availability of clinically proven interventions to prevent a host of potentially life-

threatening illnesses, utilization rates by adults continue to be disappointing -- whereas children's vaccination regimens are well entrenched in routine pediatric care and well covered by government and private insurance.

Adults may wrongly perceive that VPDs are a matter for infants and children and that the health risks from common transmissible viral and bacterial infections are high only for children. The scientific evidence, however, suggests otherwise.

The American Council on Science and Health hopes these publications will greatly enhance awareness of [Adult Immunization](#) [1] at a pivotal time.

*The American Council on Science and Health is a public health, consumer-education consortium of over 380 scientists and physicians, experts who serve on ACSH's scientific advisory panel. ACSH publishes reports on issues pertaining to the environment, nutrition, pharmaceuticals, and tobacco and helps the public deal with the real health risks productively.*

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