

The critical role of nurses in promoting immunization for adults

By Chad Rittle, DNP, MPH, RN, FAAOHN, and Ruth Francis, MPH, MCHES

CHILDREN aren't the only ones who need vaccines. Older adults and those with chronic health conditions are particularly at risk for vaccine-preventable diseases. Yet immunization coverage levels for U.S. adults are low, leaving many vulnerable to illness, hospitalization, and deaths that could have been prevented.

Based on a 2014 survey, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that only 43% of adults ages 19 and older had received an annual influenza vaccine and 20% had received the tetanus-diphtheria-pertussis (Tdap) vaccine. Also, only 20% of adults ages 19 to 64 at high risk for serious pneumococcal disease had received the pneumococcal vaccine and 28% of adults age 60 or older had received the zoster (shingles) vaccine. These numbers may indicate low awareness and knowledge about vaccine-preventable diseases.

What can nurses do to help adults get the vaccines they need and reduce the risk of severe illness? Nurses should take the lead by being up-to-date on all vaccines, including the flu shot, to protect themselves, coworkers, patients, and families.

What are the opportunities to discuss vaccination for adults who aren't current? With a nurse champion in the practice, the management team can explore systemic changes and promote immunization for adults using several activities with proven effectiveness. Nurses are logical leaders for a multidisciplinary team that focuses on disease prevention, including immunization. They can champion the cause of immunizing adults and organize pre-visit planning activities to ensure that no vaccination opportunities are missed.

The team should take advantage of the capacity of the electronic health record (EHR) to provide reminders when vaccines are needed. EHRs communicate with the state's or city's immunization information system (IIS, commonly known as the vaccine registry), promoting vaccine uptake. The IIS is a confidential, population-based, computerized database that records all immunizations administered by providers to persons residing within a given area. It can consolidate multiple immunization histories into one location. Along with EHRs, the IIS can identify which vaccines a patient needs and increase adult vaccina-

tion rates. If your practice isn't using its state or city IIS, contact your state or city IIS manager for information about benefits and practice enrollment.

Another proven way to increase adult immunization rates is to use standing orders, which enable nurses (where state law permits) to assess the patient's immunization needs and administer needed vaccines without individual physician orders. For details, see The Community Guide (thecommunityguide.org/vaccines/clientreminder.html), the Immunization Action Coalition (immunize.org/standing-orders/), or state or city immunization coalitions.

A practice that does not stock all routinely recommended adult vaccines can prepare a list of needed vaccines before patient visits, referring patients to another vaccine service provider. Using available tools, healthcare providers can prepare an informational brochure listing local vaccination sources (vaccine.healthmap.org/) so patients can easily find needed vaccines nearby.

Vaccines are one of the greatest triumphs in medicine, saving thousands of lives and preventing millions of people from becoming ill. Unfortunately, vaccines for adults remain severely underutilized. Nurses—the largest segment of healthcare professionals—are poised to make a significant difference in immunizing adults by acting as immunization champions. The Florence Nightingale Pledge closes with, "I endeavor to...devote myself to the welfare of those committed to my care." Nurses can embody this spirit through their critical role in immunizing adults. ★

ANA seeks immunization nurse champions to ensure continued discussion of the needs of nurses and to share experiences for future publications and presentations. Interested nurses should contact Ruth Francis at Ruth.Francis@ana.org.

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Visit www.AmericanNurseToday.com/?p=24207 for vaccination resources and a list of selected references.

Vaccination resources

The following websites offer important information on adult vaccinations.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention


Adult Immunization Schedule, 2016.

 cdc.gov/vaccines/schedules/hcp/adult.html


Educating Adult Patients: Vaccination Resources

 cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/adults/for-patients/adults-all.html

Immunization Information Systems (IIS) State/Territory/City Registry Staff

 cdc.gov/vaccines/programs/iis/contacts-registry-staff.html


Reminder Systems and Strategies for Increasing Adult Vaccination Rates

 cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/adults/for-practice/reminder-sys.html

3 important reasons for adults to get vaccinated

 cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/adults/downloads/fs-three-reasons.pdf

HealthMap Vaccine Finder

 vaccine.healthmap.org/

Immunization Action Coalition

Clinical Resources: Standing Orders for Administering Vaccines

 immunize.org/standing-orders/

The Guide to Community Preventive Services

Increasing Appropriate Vaccination

 thecommunityguide.org/vaccines/index.html

Increasing appropriate vaccination: Client reminder and recall systems.

 thecommunityguide.org/vaccines/clientreminder.html

Increasing appropriate vaccination: Standing orders.

 thecommunityguide.org/vaccines/standingorders.html