American Diabetes Association®

Vaccination Guidelines
for People Living with Diabetes

Vaccines are a powerful tool that help people living with diabetes stay healthy. By protecting against serious infections, vaccines can reduce the chance of hospital visits, make diabetes easier to manage, and help prevent related complications.

Why Vaccines Are Important

- **Increased risk of infections:** Diabetes can weaken the immune system, making it harder for the body to fight infections.
- **Complications from illness:** Illnesses like the flu, pneumonia, and shingles can make it harder for people living with diabetes to manage blood glucose levels, leading to further complications.
- **Preventing hospitalizations:** Vaccines help prevent serious infections that could result in hospitalization, reducing health care costs and saving lives.

Recommended Vaccines

INFLUENZA (FLU SHOT)	
Why:	The flu can lead to severe illness, hospitalization, or even death. People living with diabetes are at greater risk of serious complications.
When:	Annually, before flu season, ideally in the early fall (September or October).
Possible side effects:	Mild side effects may include soreness at the injection site, fever, or fatigue.
Notes:	All people living with diabetes are recommended to receive the inactive or recombinant influenza vaccines. Using the live attenuated (nasal spray) vaccine in people living with diabetes is NOT recommended. Advise people to contact their primary care doctor if they have flu-like symptoms, especially if they are at high risk for complications, such as people living with diabetes. Antiviral medications can help reduce the severity and duration of the flu.

PNEUMOCOCCAL (PNEUMONIA)	
Why:	People living with diabetes are at increased risk for pneumonia and other infections caused by pneumococcus bacteria and may experience more severe complications.
When:	Timing depends on age, past vaccinations, and individual health needs. Encourage people living with diabetes to speak with their primary care doctor to create a personalized vaccine plan.
Possible side effects:	Mild fever, soreness at injection site, or fatigue.

HEPATITIS B

Why:	People living with diabetes, especially those using insulin, may be more likely to get hepatitis B due to possible exposure from shared or improperly cleaned blood glucose equipment, and may also have a harder time recovering from the infection.
When:	Encourage people living with diabetes to speak with their primary care doctor about hepatitis B vaccination. In general, adults under the age of 60 should receive the vaccine, while those 60 years and older may be vaccinated based on their doctor's guidance and individual health needs.
Possible side effects:	Mild fever, pain at injection site, or headache.

SHINGLES (HERPES ZOSTER)

Why:	Shingles can cause painful, long-lasting complications, especially for people over the age of 50 and those living with diabetes, who may face a higher risk of hospitalization, nerve pain, and slower recovery due to weakened immune response.
When:	Two doses of shingles vaccine are recommended, typically for adults 50 years and older, with the second dose given two to six months after the first.
Possible side effects:	Pain or swelling at the injection site, mild fever, or fatigue.

COVID-19

Why:	People living with diabetes are at higher risk of severe illness from COVID-19. Vaccination helps prevent serious outcomes.
When:	Encourage people with diabetes to speak with their primary care doctor about when to get the COVID-19 vaccine and follow current recommendations for boosters and updates.
Possible side effects:	Mild side effects similar to the flu vaccine (e.g., fever, fatigue, sore arm).

Tdap (TETANUS, DIPHTHERIA, AND PERTUSSIS)

Why:	Tdap is especially important for people living with diabetes, who are at higher risk for respiratory infections and tetanus, especially if they have frequent hospital visits, open wounds, or interact with children.
When:	One dose every 10 years.
Possible side effects:	Redness and pain at the injection site and low-grade fever.

RSV (RESPIRATORY SYNCYTIAL VIRUS)

Why:	RSV can lead to serious illness for people living with diabetes, especially if complications like kidney disease or neuropathy are present.
When:	Adults 75 years and older should receive one dose of an RSV vaccine. Adults 50–74 years old living with diabetes may also be eligible and should speak with their primary care doctor about timing, ideally before RSV season begins in late summer or early fall.
Possible side effects:	Soreness at the injection site, fatigue, headache, and muscle pain.

How to Talk to People about Vaccines

Explain the importance of vaccinations.

- Emphasize that people living with diabetes are at higher risk for serious complications from infections, and that vaccines are a way to help prevent these complications.
- Provide reassurance that vaccines are effective in preventing potentially dangerous diseases. Vaccines teach the immune system to recognize and fight off specific pathogens.
- Emphasize that vaccines are safe and thoroughly tested before being licensed and recommended for use.

Address common concerns.

- **"Will the vaccine affect my blood glucose?"**
  - Explain that vaccines may cause mild side effects like fever or soreness, which can temporarily affect blood glucose. Encourage people to monitor their blood glucose more closely after vaccination.
- **"Are vaccines safe?"**
  - Yes, vaccines are safe and specifically recommended for people living with chronic conditions like diabetes.
- **"I'm worried about the side effects."**
  - Most side effects are mild and short-lived, such as a sore arm, mild fever, or headache. These are much less dangerous than the illnesses the vaccines prevent.

Encourage regular monitoring.

- Encourage people to keep a record of their vaccinations and share it with their health care team.
- Remind them to monitor their blood glucose levels closely before and after vaccination, especially if they feel unwell.

Help with scheduling vaccinations.

- Offer to help people schedule appointments for their vaccines and follow up to ensure they receive their vaccinations on time.
- Discuss the timing of vaccines. Some vaccines need to be spaced out over several months (e.g., hepatitis B), while others are given annually (e.g., flu).

Tips for Community Health Workers

- **Build trust**
  Approach the topic with empathy and a non-judgmental attitude. Many people living with diabetes may have concerns about vaccines, so creating an open dialogue is essential.
- **Promote preventive care**
  Frame the conversation around preventive care and self-empowerment. Encourage individuals to view vaccination as a proactive step in managing their health. Highlight everyday practices that support wellness, such as frequent handwashing, avoiding face touching, covering coughs and sneezes, and staying home when feeling ill.
- **Tailor conversations to individual needs**
  Not everyone may need the same set of vaccines. For example, someone under 50 years old may not need the shingles vaccine yet, while someone over 65 years old may need both the flu and pneumococcal vaccines.
- **Address access barriers**
  Ensure that people know where to access free or low-cost vaccines and offer support with transportation or scheduling if needed.
- **Follow up**
  Remind people about upcoming vaccine appointments and offer additional information if they have questions or concerns.

Additional Resources for Community Health Workers

- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)**
  Vaccines and Immunizations
- **World Health Organization (WHO)**
  Vaccines and Immunizations
- **Local Health Department Websites**
  Check for vaccine availability, free clinics, and local outreach programs.

Empower the Diabetes Community

Vaccinations are an essential tool in maintaining the health of people living with diabetes. By empowering those in your community to stay up to date with their vaccines, you help reduce their risk of serious illnesses and improve their quality of life. Encourage people to speak with their primary care doctor to develop a personalized vaccination schedule.

Thank you for helping protect the health of people living with diabetes!