

Adult vaccinations help protect infertile communities

by Tina Smith

Gone are the days when most adults could avoid vaccines as long as they didn't step on a rusty nail. Immunizations and booster shots are now being recommended by the Centers for Disease Control for men and women to help avoid new strains of influenza and other viruses as well as nearly eradicated childhood diseases that are making a comeback. The key, according to the CDC, is to reduce the number of carriers, which ultimately lowers the number of outbreaks.

Couples who are planning to become pregnant are in an ideal position to safeguard themselves against disease while also protecting their future children. Pre-pregnancy vaccinations allow parent-hopefuls to avoid treatment expenses, loss of work, chronic infections, lingering side effects, malignancies and even death from avoidable illnesses. Women who are vaccinated as adults also pass on immunities to their infants.

Pertussis – With the highest number of whooping cough cases reported in 40 years, vaccines and boosters have once again become the most effective way to combat the highly-contagious respiratory-tract infection known as pertussis. Because immunity wanes after five to 10 years following a vaccination, adults are encouraged to get a booster for pertussis along with tetanus and diphtheria in a single vaccine every 10 years to avoid contracting or spreading these life-threatening diseases. Pertussis has an anti-symptom stage that can last two weeks, so carriers are often contagious before coughing begins. Recent outbreaks have shown that older children, adolescents and adults may carry a milder form of the disease that is harder to recognize. Immunizations are especially critical for adults with exposure to babies and children. Pertussis is the only disease for which children in this country are routinely vaccinated that is currently on the rise.

Human Papillomavirus – The National Cancer Institute estimates more than 11,000 new cases of cervical cancer this year with 4,000 or more deaths. One cervical cancer vaccine can help protect against four of the 30 types of human papillomavirus (HPV) and is recommended for women up through the age of 26, even before they become sexually active. Pregnancy has the potential to alter

cervical conditions and possibly leave women more susceptible to viruses, so prevention prior to conception is essential.

Hepatitis – Nearly 1 out of 3 Americans has been infected with hepatitis A during his or her lifetime, and up to 50 percent of people with a hepatitis virus show none of the common signs of the liver-attacking disease. To date, vaccination is the best defense against both A & B strains; hepatitis C is not vaccine preventable. In addition to those engaging in high-risk behaviors, women and men working in the public safety and healthcare industries or traveling internationally are advised by the CDC to talk with a doctor about a series of shots to help them steer clear of these debilitating or even deadly viruses.

Tina Smith is a communications specialist who serves as the patient support coordinator for the Fertility Center at 1624 Gunbarrel Road in Chattanooga and can be reached at 423.899.0500 or tina@MyFertilityCenter.com. Tina spent a decade dealing with her own infertility and remains committed to sharing information and resources while offering encouragement and hope to other women struggling to become moms. For additional infertility articles, go to MyFertilityCenter.com and check under Support Central. Contact the Fertility Center to find out more about the benefits of vaccines for couples undergoing infertility treatment.