

In October 2005, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommended the routine use of a single dose of Tdap for adults 19-64 years of age to replace the next booster dose of tetanus and diphtheria toxoids vaccine (Td). The vaccine is also recommended for adults who have close contact with infants less than 12 months of age. These recommendations occurred shortly after Hurricane Katrina.

Unfortunately, healthcare was quite limited to New Orleans residents in the months immediately following the disaster. Although many residents obtained the Td vaccine upon returning to the city to clear debris, they are unsure or do not have documentation of the Td or Tdap vaccine. With the reopening of University Hospital and its outpatient clinics, patients have been able to return to the healthcare system. However, patients return daily who have not received healthcare in over two years. Therefore, it has been increasingly important for physicians not only in the outpatient setting but also in the hospital to provide healthcare maintenance to patients, which includes immunizations.

The changing demographics of the city with an increased immigrant population has also dictated the need for understanding not only the routine use of immunizations in adults but also the recommendations for adults who have an incomplete or unknown vaccine history. In the case of Tdap, the preferred schedule is a dose of Tdap followed by a dose of Td 4 weeks later and a second dose of Td 6 to 12 months later.

Despite reminders displayed on the walls of our hospital clinic, many residents still forget to inquire about Tdap status in their adult patients. Didactic sessions and dictation prompts as well as flyers and handouts have aided in resident awareness of the recommendations. However, daily reminders by medicine faculty in the outpatient clinics or on the wards have been the most successful. The goal is to make awareness adult immunizations as essential to a visit as it is in pediatrics.

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