



Preventive Health

Key facts

Preventive health is strategies to prevent illness or diagnose and treat it early, eg immunisation and regular health checks. People with intellectual disability should receive the same preventive health care as the rest of the community. But this does not always happen.

Many people with intellectual disability cannot explain their symptoms or say if they feel unwell, so regular health checks are crucial. Also, the cause of a person's disability can make them more likely to get a particular disease. For example, heart defects are more common in people with Down syndrome.

Families and support workers should make sure with the GP that people with intellectual disability are getting appropriate preventive health care.

How often should people have checks and screening?

Adults and children with intellectual disability can now have an annual health assessment with a GP that is paid for by Medicare. The doctor will check general health and things like medications, height and weight, diet and exercise.

Hearing and vision should be assessed every 3 to 5 years and people should have a dental check every 6 months.

People's skin should be checked every year for sun spots or cancers. Some people with intellectual disability will need support to protect them from sun damage that could lead to skin cancer.

GPs can organise screening for bowel cancer. This is recommended for all people over 50 and earlier for some people with a family history of bowel cancer.

Immunisation

All people with intellectual disability should be vaccinated on the same schedule as other people. Also, Hepatitis A vaccine is recommended for people with intellectual disability, and the combined Hepatitis A and B immunisations should be considered.

Many people with intellectual disability die from respiratory disease. Consult the GP about an annual flu injection. This is an option for everyone. Flu injections are very important for people over 65 or with some health conditions or who live in congregate care.

People aged over 65 or who have diabetes, chronic heart, kidney or respiratory illness should also have the pneumococcal vaccine – this protects against one type of pneumonia.

Women's health

All women need regular breast examinations and women over 50 should have mammograms every 2 years. Women who are or used to be sexually active should have a Pap smear every 2 years. Families and support workers will often need to help a woman understand these procedures and reassure her during the appointment.

Some women need to have regular bone mineral density scans. You can discuss this with the GP at an annual health assessment.



Men's health

Some conditions are more common in males with intellectual disability. Some boys have hormone deficiencies that impede puberty. The genitals may not grow normally, hair may not grow on the face and muscles may not develop. This condition is treatable.

Some men's testicles do not descend and so the doctor should check genitals every year. They should also check for signs of testicular cancer.

For men over 50, talk to the doctor about whether regular prostate screening should occur. Many men with intellectual disability will need support from family or support workers when they have prostate screening or an examination of their genitals.

Medical history

An accurate record of a person's medical history makes it easier for a doctor to know what preventive health is needed. This should be part of the Personal Health Record of each person with intellectual disability.

The Personal Health Record also should include a history of diseases in the family. Some conditions run in families, eg bowel cancer and high cholesterol.

For more information

Health care policy and procedures ADHC NSW

www.adhc.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/file/0007/228094/Health_Care_Policy_Sept_2010.pdf

Pap test: the plain facts, a booklet for people with intellectual disability

www.cddh.monash.org/assets/paptestbooklet.pdf

Preventative women's health care for women with intellectual disabilities

www.cds.org.au/publications-home/cat_view/50-health-publications

Being a healthy woman - An educational resource for women with intellectual disability, their families, health care providers, carers and support workers

www.health.nsw.gov.au/pubs/2010/pdf/being_a_healthy_woman.pdf

QCIDD online resources on mammograms.

www2.som.uq.edu.au/som/Research/ResearchCentres/qcidd/Pages/Resources.aspx

You might be interested in these fact sheets

- Annual health assessments
- Causes of intellectual disability and health care
- Healthy lifestyles
- Personal health records

This fact sheet was updated in June 2011.

The fact sheet contains general information only and does not take into account individual circumstances. It should not be relied on for medical advice. We encourage you to look at the information in this fact sheet carefully with your health professional to decide whether the information is right for you.