

Preventive Health

People with intellectual disability should be involved in all decisions about their health and wellbeing.

Some people can make decisions alone and some people will need support. It is critical that supporters know the person's will and preferences to make sure the right support is provided and the right decision is made.

Preventive health strategies aim to prevent illness or diagnose and treat it early for example 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 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.

Most people with an intellectual disability will have required medication that can make their bones more fragile. A bone mineral density screen can be helpful to check for Osteoporosis, especially as people get closer to middle age.

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.

The shingles vaccination can help prevent painful skin condition shingles and should be given to all people 70 years and older. Booster immunisation for Whooping cough is needed from 50 years of age or for those in regular contact with very young babies.

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 who are over 65 or with some health conditions or who live in congregate care.

People aged over 65 or who have heart, liver or congenital disease, 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.

All women should be familiar with the normal look and feel of their breasts, this may be difficult for those with an intellectual disability. A regular breast examination by their GP is recommended. All women aged 50-74 are encouraged to have a free mammogram every two years.

Women 25-74 years old should have the Cervical Screening Test, every five years or earlier if the woman has the HPV virus. It is similar to the old 'Pap smear' and should be done two years after their last Pap smear.

Families and support workers will often need to help a woman with intellectual disability understand these procedures and reassure her during the appointment.

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, face and muscles may not develop. This condition is treatable. Some men's testicles do not descend, rates of testicular cancer are higher for this group and men with an intellectual disability. The doctor should check their genitals for signs of cancer at least yearly.

Prostate cancer occurs more commonly in men aged over 50. The blood test 'PSA level' can be helpful in detection. The digital rectal examination is no longer a routine test. Families and support workers will often need to help a man with intellectual disability understand these procedures and reassure him during the appointment.

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 and eHealth record of each person with intellectual

eHealth is an electronic medical record system that connects doctors, nurses, and other professionals to provide high-quality health care and enable people to better manage their care at home. A person's information is available to clinical staff at the point of care when and where they need it. Through the Health eNet System, clinical staff have access to a person's records from all New South Wales Hospitals.

For more information

eHealth NSW

www.ehealth.nsw.gov.au

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

www.papscreen.org.au/downloads/resources/brochures/Pap_tests_the_plain_facts.pdf

Preventative women's health care for women with intellectual disabilities

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/disability/Pages/being-a-healthy-woman.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 **2018**.

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.