

"Impact of Influenza Vaccination on Seasonal Mortality in the US Elderly Population" by Simonsen et al. (2005)

A Statement by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH)

A study published this week in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* reports that vaccination of the elderly population against influenza may be less effective in preventing death among the elderly than previously assumed. This study's findings have caused some confusion about whether people 65 years old and older should receive an influenza vaccination.

CDC and NIH continue to support the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommendation that people aged 65 and older get vaccinated against influenza each year. People aged 65 and older are at highest risk for complications, hospitalizations, and deaths from influenza. Vaccination remains the best protection from influenza available for people 65 and older and their loved ones.

Numerous studies have shown that influenza vaccination works- including to help protect the elderly from serious illness and hospitalizations- but the degree to which it works varies from year to year and can be difficult to measure. For example, influenza seasons differ each year in length and severity, and the health status of individuals also matters.

In the current study by Simonsen et al, the authors in no way imply that the elderly should not receive influenza vaccine. Rather, the study concludes that the vaccine may prevent fewer deaths among the elderly than previous studies would have suggested. Therefore, the authors note that there is room for improvement in influenza prevention efforts, including research into developing more effective vaccines for the elderly and the increased use of medicines to treat flu.

In addition, recently published studies raise the possibility that it may be beneficial to vaccinate larger numbers of healthy persons, including children, to prevent transmission of influenza viruses to high-risk persons such as the elderly.

Expansion of groups for whom influenza vaccination is recommended is under discussion by the ACIP and CDC, and is partly contingent on adequate vaccine supply in the future.

The CDC and ACIP continually review their influenza vaccine recommendations as well as studies and published research in order to develop the best recommendations for protecting all Americans from influenza. This study is a reminder that there is room for improvement in how we protect the elderly from influenza, and CDC and NIH encourage research that strengthens our ability to do so.