

General seniors
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Older Americans More Likely to Be Hit Harder by the Flu *Vaccination Can Save Your Life*

Older Americans have been around the block a few times and know plenty about surviving life's challenges—big and small. But one challenge that many will face this and every flu season is “influenza,” which might present more than a minor setback. For most people, getting influenza, commonly known as “the flu” means feeling achy and feverish for a week or so. But for people 65 years and older, the flu can be much more serious, even deadly. People in this age group are at high risk of serious flu complications because they have weaker immune systems, making them more vulnerable to illnesses such as flu.

Each year in the U.S., an average of 36,000 people die and more than 200,000 are hospitalized from serious flu complications. Ninety percent of flu deaths and more than half of hospitalizations occur in people 65 years and older. However, about 30% of persons 65 or older don't get vaccinated each year.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is urging people 65 years and older to get their annual flu vaccine. While vaccination is important for all age groups, it is particularly important for people 65 and older. Those who have chronic medical conditions such as asthma, diabetes, kidney disease, or cancer, should be especially proactive in getting an influenza vaccine this year.

The flu is a contagious disease that can cause symptoms such as high fever, sore throat, headache, coughing, tiredness and muscle aches, and can easily spread from person to person. Worst of all, the flu may result in major health complications such as a deterioration of pre-existing health conditions, bacterial pneumonia and dehydration.

Vaccination is the first and most important step in protecting yourself and the people you love against this serious disease. After getting the vaccine, the body takes about two weeks to build up immunity to the flu viruses in the vaccine. This is why getting the vaccine is recommended as soon as it becomes available in your community, continuing into December, January, and beyond. While flu outbreaks can happen as early as October, most of the time flu activity peaks in January or later.

The flu vaccine is safe and effective, and because the three influenza viruses in the flu shot are killed, you cannot get the flu from the vaccine. Since flu viruses change every year, the flu vaccine is updated annually, making it necessary to be vaccinated each year.

To learn where to get a flu vaccine, contact your doctor or local health department. To learn more, call CDC at 1-800-CDC-INFO or visit www.cdc.gov/flu.