

Flu and Pneumonia Vaccinations Decrease Relative Morbidity Risk for People with Diabetes

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People with diabetes are about three times more likely to die with flu and pneumonia than people without diabetes. That means that each year, 10,000 to 30,000 people with diabetes die with complications of the flu and pneumonia. During flu epidemics, people with diabetes are six times more likely to be hospitalized than people without diabetes, and their death rates may increase 5 to 15 percent. This risk is particularly high when additional risk factors such as cardiovascular disease and kidney disease are present.

A pneumococcal shot and an annual flu shot could prevent complications and death associated with pneumonia and the flu. Yet about half of adults with diabetes do not get a simple, safe flu shot and only one third of adults with diabetes are immunized against pneumococcal pneumonia. Worse yet, pneumococcal disease has become more resistant to penicillin and other drugs, making treatment more difficult. Aggressive efforts need to be taken to increase influenza and pneumococcal immunization levels among people with diabetes to decrease the number of preventable flu and pneumonia-related deaths.

Typically, physician-regulated diabetes care emphasizes aggressive control of the disease to retard the onset and progression of long-term complications affecting the eyes, kidneys, and cardiovascular and nervous systems. Concentration may be only on diabetes itself, and not on the overall health of the patient. As a result, we may overlook general preventive measures, such as flu and pneumonia shots, that we would recommend to our patients without diabetes.

CDC is launching a national awareness campaign this fall to encourage people with diabetes to get a flu shot before flu season and to talk to their doctor about getting a pneumococcal vaccination. Flu season is generally November through March, and the pneumococcal vaccine can be given to people with diabetes at the same time as a flu shot.

You can help by including influenza and pneumonia vaccinations as part of a regular diabetes management program. Some of the ways you can incorporate this care into your practice include:

- **Recommending flu and pneumonia shots** to patients with diabetes when they come for routine care, especially this flu season.
- Considering **instituting standing orders** to make the immunizations a routine part of the health care regimen for patients with diabetes.
- Educating patients about **how to obtain reimbursement** for vaccination.
- Educating patients about how **simple, safe and effective** the flu and pneumonia shots are, and how dangerous the flu and pneumonia are for people with diabetes.

Please encourage your patients to be vaccinated to protect themselves from these preventable risks and take control of their diabetes.

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