

Health Bulletin



The Flu Hits Older Americans The Hardest: Vaccination Is Best Protection

(NAPSA)—Getting an annual flu shot could save your life this flu season. That's why the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is strongly urging seniors 65 years and older to get their annual influenza, or "flu," vaccine. While the vaccine is important for all age groups, those over age 65 and experiencing cardiovascular and/or other chronic medical conditions such as asthma, diabetes, kidney disease or cancer should be especially proactive.

One bout with the flu can result in major health complications. A recent study from the American Heart Association shows that influenza-related death is more common among people with cardiovascular disease than with any other chronic condition. While most Americans have had some experience with or exposure to the flu, most do not know that the flu virus can lead to hospitalization and even death in high-risk individuals.

On average, 36,000 Americans die each year, and 200,000 are hospitalized due to serious complications from the flu.

The flu, which can cause symptoms such as high fever, headache, coughing, nausea, weakness and muscle aches, can easily spread from person to person when an infected person coughs or sneezes near others. Vaccination is the single best way to protect yourself and the people you love from getting the flu.

Timing for flu vaccination is critical, as the flu typically peaks in January or later and it takes about two weeks for the body to build up immunity to the flu after



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vaccination. That's why vaccination is encouraged as soon as vaccine becomes available in your community or anytime between September and January or later. Even if influenza has already hit your community, you may benefit from vaccination.

With more flu vaccine available this year than ever before, CDC officials say that seniors should make every effort to get vaccinated, adding that Medicare Part B covers the shot in full.

The flu shot is safe and effective and cannot cause the flu. Because different influenza viruses circulate each season, a new flu vaccine must be made each year to fight these viruses. That's why it's critical to get a flu vaccine every year.

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