

# Health Awareness



## Adults 65 And Older Should Understand Flu-Related Risks And Their Vaccination Options

(NAPSA)—During the 2014-2015 flu season, it's important to remember that the single best way to prevent influenza ("the flu") is to get an annual vaccination, which the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends for everyone aged six months and older, with rare exception. As people age, the immune system weakens, even if they feel healthy and are active, which makes it harder to fight disease. As a result, adults aged 65 and older are more likely to catch the flu and experience complications.

The flu is a contagious illness that can be severe and life threatening, especially for older adults. People 65 years of age and older typically account for more than half (60 percent) of flu-related hospitalizations and almost all (90 percent) flu-related deaths.

The *Flu + You* program, a national public education initiative sponsored by the National Council on Aging (NCOA) in collaboration with Sanofi Pasteur, educates older adults and those who care for them about the seriousness of the flu, the importance of annual vaccination, and available vaccine options. Award-winning actress Judith Light, known for TV's *Dallas*, *Who's the Boss?*, and *Ugly Betty*, has joined the campaign this year as a national spokesperson.

"Although I don't feel like I'm getting any older, I know that my body is getting older, and coming down with the flu can really make me sick," said Light. "No matter how healthy and active we feel, getting an annual flu vaccination is important and I learned there are different flu vaccine options for people 65 and older. I want to encourage others to speak with their doctor or pharmacist to find



**The National Council on Aging and Judith Light encourage people 65+ to ask about their flu shot options. Watch the video at [www.NCOA.org/Flu](http://www.NCOA.org/Flu).**

out more about getting vaccinated against the flu."

The flu can make existing health problems worse and is especially dangerous for people with chronic conditions, such as diabetes, heart disease or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, which commonly affect older adults. Eighty-six percent of adults aged 65 and older have at least one chronic condition, and 68 percent of Medicare beneficiaries have two or more. Worsening of these serious conditions may result in hospitalization and an inability to take part in simple daily activities and live independently.

"Research shows that the immune system weakens with age, which means older adults are more likely to catch the flu and that they can suffer greater complications because of other health issues," said Albert Terrillion, DrPH, MEd, CPH, NCOA Senior Director for Clinical and Community Partnerships and Director of NCOA's Self-Management Alli-

ance. "Through our *Flu + You* program, we encourage all older adults to protect themselves by getting an annual flu vaccine as soon as they can."

Older adults have flu vaccine options, including the traditional standard-dose flu vaccine and a higher-dose vaccine. Both options are available at a doctor's office or local pharmacy. The higher-dose vaccine was developed specifically for people aged 65 and older to improve the body's production of antibody against the flu. Flu vaccination is a Medicare Part B benefit, which means there is no copay for Medicare beneficiaries 65 years of age and older.

Older adults and their caregivers can learn more about vaccine options and the importance of getting an annual flu vaccine on the *Flu + You* website, [www.ncoa.org/Flu](http://www.ncoa.org/Flu), which features free educational materials, infographics and other sharable content, and a public service announcement with Judith Light.