

News For Seniors And Their Families

Older Adults at High Risk for Flu, a Leading Cause of Hospitalization and Even Death for Those 65 and Over

(NAPSA)—Over the next decade, millions of baby boomers will begin their well-earned transition into retirement. This unique stage in life allows retirees time to do more of the things they love like enjoy time with friends and family, but it also comes with the added responsibility of keeping a closer eye on health to maintain an active lifestyle.

It may then come as a surprise to learn that despite the fact that older adults are over 16 times more likely to be hospitalized due to the flu and its related complications than younger adults, nearly 30 percent of Americans age 65 and older remained unvaccinated this past flu season.

As people age, the immune system weakens, which puts adults 65 and older at increased risk for flu. In fact, each year in the United States, more than nine out of 10 flu-related deaths and six out of 10 flu-related hospitalizations occur in adults 65 and older. Annual flu vaccination is the safest and most effective way to protect against the flu each season.

To help increase awareness about the dangers flu poses to older adults, the National Council on Aging (NCOA) has launched the Flu + You campaign. This educational program aims to educate older Americans, their caregivers, and family members about the seriousness of influenza in older adults, the importance of annual vaccination, and the available vaccine options for adults 65 and older.



Older adults are particularly vulnerable to the flu, so annual vaccination is crucial.

A recent survey of middle-age and older adults found that almost 90 percent would seek vaccination after getting information from their doctor and two-thirds also noted that friends and family could influence their vaccination decision.

To help bring a health provider's perspective, Dr. Carolyn B. Bridges, Associate Director for Adult Immunizations at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), has joined the Flu + You campaign to emphasize the importance of annual vaccination for older adults.

"A flu vaccine is recommended for everyone 6 months of age and older," said Dr. Bridges. "It's critical for adults 65 and older to get vaccinated because they are at greatest risk for developing severe complications of influenza when they get infected. Adults in this age group have two available options—the traditional flu shot and a higher dose flu shot, which is designed to address the decline

of the immune system with age. Both of these vaccines are covered by Medicare."

The higher dose shot triggers the body to produce more antibodies against the flu virus than would be produced by the traditional shot. Antibodies are the soldiers of the immune system that help respond and protect against infection.

"No matter how healthy or youthful you may feel or appear, older adults are highly susceptible to the flu," said Richard Birkel, PhD, MPA, acting senior vice president of Healthy Aging and director of NCOA's Self-Management Alliance, while stressing the specific danger the flu poses to older adults. "NCOA hopes that through education, older adults will realize how serious the flu is and make vaccination a priority."

Speak with your health care provider about the dangers of the flu, the benefits of vaccination, and the best vaccine option to meet your needs. And remember, getting your flu vaccination not only helps protect you, but helps to prevent the spread of the flu to friends and family.

To learn more about these important health messages, please visit www.NCOA.org/Flu where you'll find access to more information on the Flu + You campaign, as well as educational materials available for download. Flu + You is a program of the National Council on Aging in collaboration with Sanofi Pasteur.