

HIGH DOSE FLU VACCINE for SENIORS

Did you know that a simple flu shot or pneumonia vaccination can save YOUR life? According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 36,000 Americans die each year from flu and 200,000 are hospitalized. Even though people aged 50 and above are at the highest risk of death from flu, a large percentage of seniors refuse to get the low-cost, life-saving flu vaccine.

A common myth is that people can catch the flu from having a flu shot. While this was true several years ago when the flu vaccine was made using live virus, it is now impossible to get the flu from a flu shot because only killed or inactivated virus is used to make the vaccine.

People of all ages die each year from flu complications. Increasing age and the presence of chronic medical conditions cause immune systems to be less effective at fighting off the flu virus. In 2010, vaccine manufacturer Sanofi Pasteur introduced a High Dose flu vaccine recommended specifically for seniors aged 65 and older. This formulation contains the same three strains of influenza virus as the vaccine that is given to everyone else, but it contains a higher concentration in order to be more effective in that age group that may have a less effective immune response.

The CDC now recommends that all of us, beginning at 6 months of age, take a flu shot every year. In times of flu vaccine shortage, however, the following groups should be considered as high priority and should receive their vaccine first:

- People fifty years of age and older
- People of any age with certain chronic medical conditions
- People who live in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities
- Children aged six months to nineteen years
- Pregnant women
- People who live with or care for those at high risk for complications from flu, including:
 - Health care workers
 - Household contacts of persons at high risk for complications from the flu
 - Household contacts and out of home caregivers of children less than six months of age because these children are too young to be vaccinated.

In addition to a yearly flu shot, people aged 50 and older should consider taking the Pneumococcal (pneumonia) vaccine. The current vaccine, Pneumovax 23 prevents twenty-three different strains of bacterial pneumonia for the rest of your life if you are healthy and have no other risk factors. It can be given to people of all ages, not just the elderly, although persons aged 65 and older and those who reside in nursing homes are among the highest risk. For those with certain health conditions, their physician may recommend taking the Pneumococcal vaccine every five years.

While flu and pneumonia vaccinations are the most important to get at this time of year, vaccines play a vital role in the prevention of potentially deadly diseases year round. Many in the 50 plus age group remember stories of friends or family members contracting diseases such as influenza, polio, measles, diphtheria and rubella and being forever disabled or even killed by these devastating diseases. Since 1955 when the Salk polio vaccine was declared “safe, effective and potent,” great strides have been made in reducing and eliminating vaccine-preventable diseases in the United States. Today, there are few reminders of the suffering, disabilities, and premature deaths caused by more than 20 diseases that are now preventable with vaccines.

In the United States, only 25 percent of all Americans are fully vaccinated. Yet adults are much more likely to die from vaccine-preventable diseases than children. Why? Many adults do not have a primary care doctor, they may not see their doctor regularly, or they change doctors frequently causing their immunization status to simply fall through the cracks. Many patients in high-risk groups with chronic medical conditions often see several different specialists, with none of them taking primary responsibility for keeping up with immunizations. In addition, many adults mistakenly think vaccines are only for children and therefore never think about vaccine-preventable diseases which may affect them.

In a report by the National Vaccine Program Office (NVPO), the public health burden of vaccine-preventable diseases among adults is stated as follows:

“Approximately 45,000 adults in the United States die annually of complications from influenza, pneumococcal infections, and Hepatitis B—the primary vaccine-preventable diseases affecting adults. Although effective vaccines to prevent these diseases are available, they are widely underutilized.”
(*Adult Immunization Action Plan: Report of the Workgroup on Adult Immunization*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, CDC, 1998)

Hepatitis B is a sexually transmitted disease that is drastically on the rise in the 50 and above age group. Many seniors do not think they have to worry about the diseases traditionally associated with the younger age groups, when in reality their risk is much higher. This increased risk is in part due to the advent of Viagra and the fact that many people are engaging in sexual relations with multiple sex partners and are not using protection such as condoms. There are more new cases of HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis B and other STD's in the 50 plus age group than in many of the other groups. So although many people do not think about these issues, vaccination against Hepatitis B and the practice of safe sex are both very important for sexually active seniors.

There are other important vaccines recommended for adults, such as Tetanus/diphtheria, Hepatitis A and Shingles. But the most important vaccines that all seniors should consider are the vaccines for Influenza and Pneumonia. If you are a senior adult, you should talk with your primary care physician to determine the best plan for staying healthy and safe from vaccine-preventable diseases...then get vaccinated... cause you've got a lot of livin' left to do!

This article was written by Kaye Ivanoff, RN of SHOTS, etc., a Nashville-based provider of all vaccinations needed by adolescents and adults to stay healthy for work or school requirements, world travel and everyday life. For more information about services available for companies and individuals, please call 615-469-7413 or visit www.SHOTSetc.com. SHOTS, etc. is located at 7648 Hwy 70 So. Ste 15, Nashville, TN 37221.

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