



IT'S FALL. FLU SEASON TIME AGAIN.

Flu and Other Potentially Life-Saving Shots

If you're 65 or older, getting an influenza, or "flu," vaccination could save your life. Each year in the United States alone, an average of 200,000 people are hospitalized and 36,000 people - many of them older adults -- die due to complications from the flu. Getting the flu shot or flu nasal-spray vaccine is the single, best way to protect yourself and people you love from influenza. As fall approaches, it's time for seniors to make plans to get that all-important flu shot. Studies show that older adults are more likely than younger adults to become seriously ill after contracting the flu or other infections. In fact, the flu alone kills more than 20,000 Americans, most of them 65 and older, each year.

According to American Geriatrics Society (AGS) President Todd P. Semla, Pharm D, healthcare providers and clinics often start offering flu shots in early autumn, because it's best to get the shot a few weeks before the flu season begins. Schedule a flu shot with your healthcare provider, or ask him or her where you can get a flu shot.

"You should also talk to your healthcare provider about other vaccinations that older adults may need," Dr. Semla adds. These may include shots to protect you against pneumococcal disease, tetanus, diphtheria, and other potentially deadly illnesses.

Medicare covers flu and pneumococcal shots and most other vaccines that protect seniors' health.

The AGS recommends the following vaccinations for most older adults:

Flu Shot

What It Does: Protects against the influenza virus (but not against "avian" or "bird" flu; there is no vaccine for bird flu at this time)

Who Needs It: Anyone who is 50 or older, or lives in a nursing home, or has a serious health condition such as heart disease, diabetes, asthma, lung disease or HIV. Older adults' caregivers should also get a flu shot, as should pregnant women and children younger than 2-years-old.

Who Shouldn't Get It: People who are allergic to eggs, have had allergic reactions to flu shots in the past, or have been diagnosed with Guillian-Barre Syndrome

When to Get It: Every year, ideally in October or November

Pneumococcal Shot

What It Does: Protects against pneumococcal bacteria, which can cause pneumonia and blood and brain infections

Who Needs It: Anyone who needs a flu shot

When to Get It: Only once, unless you had the shot before turning 65 (in that case you'll need a "booster" shot after 5 years.)

Tetanus/Diphtheria Shot

What It Does: Protects against two potentially deadly bacterial infections

Who Needs It: Everyone

When to Get It: Once every 10 years