

Flu + You

Protect. Learn. Understand. Safeguard.
Educating older adults about influenza and prevention
From the National Council on Aging and Sanofi Pasteur



Influenza, commonly known as “the flu,” is a contagious respiratory illness that can be severe and life-threatening, especially for older adults.

- Symptoms of the flu often include fever, headache, tiredness, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose and body aches.
- The flu is easily passed from person to person through coughing, sneezing or through contact with fluids from an infected person’s mouth or nose.
- One reason that flu can be severe for adults 65 years of age and older is because the immune system weakens with age, which makes it harder to fight disease.
- Adults 65 years of age and older were impacted by an estimated 8.3 million illnesses, 4.7 million medical visits and 758,000 flu hospitalizations during the 2014-2015 flu season.
- Each year in the United States, more than half of flu-related hospitalizations and almost all of flu-related deaths occur in people 65 years of age and older.

Annual flu vaccination is one of the things you can do to help maintain your health, and is the single best way to help protect yourself from the flu.

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends annual flu vaccination for everyone six months of age and older, with rare exception.
- It is estimated that during the 2014-2015 flu season, almost 58,000 hospitalizations were averted due to vaccination in those 65 years of age and older.
- For those 65 years of age and older, it’s important to try to get vaccinated early in the season. A study shows that early vaccination is associated with greater benefit compared to later in the season. However, it is never too late to get vaccinated.
- An estimated 67 percent of people 65 years of age and older were vaccinated against the flu during the 2014-2015 flu season.
- Adults 65 years of age and older have flu vaccine options. A higher-dose vaccine was developed specifically to address the age-related weakening of the immune system.
- Flu vaccination is a Medicare benefit with no copay. A higher-dose option is widely available; talk to your health care provider about flu vaccine options.

The flu can be dangerous in older adults as it can worsen other chronic health conditions such as heart disease and diabetes.

- An NCOA survey of more than 1,000 U.S. adults 65 years of age and older found that about one third of survey respondents are unaware that someone with chronic health conditions such as heart disease or diabetes would be at risk for complications from the flu.
- People with these chronic health conditions are more likely to develop complications from the flu that can result in hospitalization and even death.
 - 86% of adults 65 years of age and older have at least one chronic health condition, and 68% of Medicare beneficiaries have two or more.
 - Among adults 65 years of age and older, about 30% have heart disease, and about 20% have diabetes.

While flu hits older adults the hardest, many underestimate the seriousness of the flu.

- During recent flu seasons, those 65 years of age and older had the highest rate of influenza-associated hospitalization.
- The NCOA survey found that 82% of seniors are not extremely confident in their knowledge of the age-related decline of the immune system as it relates to the flu.
- Additionally, only 13% of seniors are extremely confident in their knowledge of possible flu complications.

Surprisingly, many adults 65 years of age and older are largely unaware they have flu vaccine options.

- Only 8% of NCOA survey respondents are concerned about getting the flu, despite the high hospitalization incidence in seniors.
- Overall, adults 65 years of age and older are not extremely confident in their knowledge of resources for information about the flu.

A health care provider can discuss flu vaccine options for those 65 years of age and older. Visit www.ncoa.org/Flu for more information.

Flu + You is an educational program from National Council on Aging and Sanofi Pasteur.