

What You Should Know and Do this Flu Season If You Are 65 Years and Older

It has been recognized for many years that people 65 years and older are at greater risk of serious complications from the flu compared with young, healthy adults. It's estimated that 90 percent of seasonal flu-related deaths and more than 60 percent of seasonal flu-related hospitalizations in the United States each year occur in people 65 years and older. This is because human immune defenses become weaker with age. So influenza can be a very serious disease for people 65 and older.

Actions to Take This Flu Season:

1. **Get Your Flu shot:** the best way to prevent the flu is with a flu vaccine. CDC recommends that everyone 6 months of age and older get a seasonal flu vaccine as soon as it becomes available in your community. Vaccination is especially important for people 65 years and older because they are at increased risk for complications from flu. The vaccine has been updated for this season and immunity wanes over a year, so you should get vaccinated this year even if you were vaccinated last season. Immunity sets in about two weeks after vaccination.
2. **Practice good health habits** including covering coughs, washing hands often, and avoiding people who are sick.
3. **Seek medical advice quickly if you develop flu symptoms** to see whether you might need medical evaluation or treatment with antiviral drugs. It's very important that antiviral drugs be used early to treat flu in people who are very sick with flu. People 65 and older have greater risk of getting serious flu complications.

Flu symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people may also have vomiting and diarrhea. People may be infected with the flu and have respiratory symptoms without a fever.

If you have Medicare-You have coverage for your Flu Shot!

With original Medicare you pay nothing for a flu shot if the doctor or other qualified health care provider accepts assignment for giving the shot, and the Part B deductible doesn't apply. If you get your flu shot from a doctor who doesn't accept assignment, you may have to pay an additional fee for the doctor's services, but not for the shot itself.

Related resources

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):
<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/season/flu-season-2014-2015.htm>
- Medicare & You 2014