



The AGS Foundation for Health in Aging's

It's That Time of Year Again: Flu and Other Potentially Life-Saving Shots

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 32,000 older adults each year.

According to American Geriatrics Society Research Committee member Kenneth Schmader, MD, healthcare providers and clinics often start offering flu shots in early autumn, because it's best to get the shot a few weeks before flu season begins. Schedule a flu shot with your healthcare provider, or ask him or her where you can get a flu shot.

“More and more older adults are recognizing how essential flu shots are to their health, but there are other potentially life-saving vaccinations that older adults also need, but may not be getting,” says Dr. Schmader, Professor of Medicine-Geriatrics at Duke University & Geriatric Research Education and Clinical Center (GRECC), Durham VA Medical Centers in Durham, North Carolina. These may include shots to protect 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, children aged 6 months through 18 years old, and health care workers.

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

Herpes zoster (shingles) Shot

What It Does: Protects against the development of shingles—outbreaks of sometimes intensely painful rashes or blisters on the skin—reducing the risk by 51%. Protects against the development of chronic pain from shingles (also called postherpetic neuralgia), reducing the risk by 66%.

Who Needs It: Adults 60 years of age and older

Who Should Not Get It: People who have active tuberculosis, or problems with their immune system—such as leukemia, lymphoma, other malignant diseases involving the bone marrow or lymph system or HIV infection—and those taking drugs that suppress the immune system

When to Get It: Once

What else can I do to protect myself and others from contagious diseases?

- Wash your hands—use soap and hot water or an alcohol-based, no-rinse hand sanitizer—often. Bacteria and viruses, such as the flu virus, often spread when people touch something contaminated with these germs and then touch their eyes, noses or mouths.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick—and keep your distance from others when you're the one who's sick.
- Cover your mouth and nose (preferably with a tissue) when you cough or sneeze

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also recommends

additional shots—including the *Measles, Mumps, Rubella (MMR)* vaccination, and shots for *Varicella, Hepatitis A and B*, and *Meningococcal disease*—for older adults who run an increased risk of these diseases because they have certain health problems, occupations, or lifestyles. Ask your healthcare provider if you should get any of these additional shots.



Foundation for Health in Aging

Established by the American Geriatrics Society

350 Fifth Avenue
Suite 801
New York, NY 10118
212-755-6810
www.healthinaging.org

The Foundation for Health in Aging builds a bridge between the research and practice of geriatrics health care professionals and the public. The Foundation advocates on behalf of older adults and their special needs through public education, clinical research, and public policy.

The American Geriatrics Society is dedicated to improving the health and well-being of older adults. With a membership of over 6,000 health care professionals, the AGS has a long history of improving the health care of older adults.