

Matte Article: **Flu Advice for Seniors**
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Seniors among Groups Hardest Hit by Flu

For most people, getting the flu means feeling achy and feverish for a week or so, but for people 65 years and older, the flu can be much more serious. People in this age group are at high risk for severe flu illness and complications. In fact, an estimated 60 percent of flu-related hospitalizations in the United States occur in this age group each year. Last season flu illness was particularly severe for people 65 and older, prompting CDC to report the highest flu-related hospitalization rates in this age group since it began tracking this information during the 2005-2006 flu season.

Unfortunately, the burden of flu illness in people 65 and older was accompanied by reports that the flu vaccine did not work as well as expected to protect people in this age group against one particular flu virus last season. If that news left you asking yourself whether getting a flu vaccine this season is still worthwhile for people 65 and older, the answer is absolutely and unquestionably, “Yes!”

There are plenty of reasons for people 65 and older to get a flu vaccination this year, and vaccination remains the first, best and most important step in protecting against flu illness and its complications.

While the benefits of flu vaccination can vary – and this is particularly true in people 65 and older – studies show that vaccination can provide a range of benefits, including reducing flu illness, antibiotic use, doctor’s visits, lost work, and even helping to prevent hospitalizations and deaths.

In fact, a recent study by CDC and Vanderbilt University experts found that flu vaccination reduced the risk of flu-related hospitalization by nearly 77 percent in study participants 50 years of age and older during the 2011-2012 flu season.*

Other studies have found that flu vaccination reduces the risk of death in older adults. For people with certain underlying heart conditions, several studies indicate that flu vaccination can reduce the risk of a heart attack. Overall, there is significant evidence to support the benefits of vaccination in people 65 and older.

If you are in this age group, there are two flu vaccine options available to choose from this season: the standard flu shot and a high-dose flu shot made and approved specifically for people 65 years of age and older.

The high-dose vaccine contains more antigen (the part of the vaccine that helps your body build up protection against flu viruses) than the regular flu shot, and this extra antigen is intended to produce a stronger immune response in seniors. CDC does not have a preference for which vaccine seniors should get this season. “Either the regular flu shot or the high-dose vaccine are perfectly acceptable options for people 65 and older this season,” said Dr. Alicia Fry with CDC’s Influenza Division. “The important thing is to get vaccinated because it’s still the best protection currently available against the flu.”

Flu vaccine is offered in many locations. Use the vaccine finder at <http://vaccine.healthmap.org/> to find a flu vaccination clinic near you. Medicare covers both flu and pneumonia vaccines with no co-pay or deductible. As part of the Affordable

Care Act, all plans in the Health Insurance Marketplace and other plans will provide many free preventive services, including flu vaccinations. For information about the Health Insurance Marketplace, visit www.HealthCare.gov. Health Insurance Marketplace open enrollment starts October 1, 2013, and ends March 31, 2014. Coverage can begin as soon as January 1, 2014. For more information about influenza or vaccination, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/flu>, or call 1-800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636).

- * [Talbot HK, Zhu Y, Chen Q, et al. Effectiveness of influenza vaccine for preventing laboratory-confirmed influenza hospitalizations in adults, 2011-2012 influenza season. Clin Infect Dis. 2013; doi: 10.1093/cid/cit124.](#)