



INFLUENZA VACCINATION QUESTIONS PATIENTS AGE 65 AND OLDER FREQUENTLY ASK THEIR HCP

HCPs play an important role in ensuring adults age 65 and older are vaccinated against the flu. It has been shown that most adults believe that vaccines are important and are likely to receive them if recommended by their HCP.¹ There are a variety of misperceptions about influenza and the influenza vaccine that may influence your older patients and make them skeptical of getting the vaccine.^{2,3} Countering these misperceptions requires hard facts.

Below you'll find a series of potential questions your older adult patients may be asking, with suggested evidence-based responses to help guide your discussion with them on their changing risks, and the importance of an annual flu vaccination.

I'm healthy and active. Am I still at risk for the flu?

Yes. In fact, you are at a higher risk for complications due to flu because of your age. As you age, your immune system becomes less effective, making you more vulnerable to diseases like the flu.⁴

Can the flu shot give me the flu?

The flu vaccine cannot give you the flu. Flu vaccines used in older adults use inactivated ("killed") viruses or those with no flu virus at all (known as a recombinant vaccine), neither of which has the ability to cause flu-related infection. Sometimes people may not feel well shortly after they get vaccinated and assume there is a connection, but any flu-like symptoms you might experience may be part of your body's reaction as it develops immunity, or it could be an unrelated illness. If you actually do get flu soon after getting the shot, it could be that you were exposed before you were vaccinated; it takes about 2 weeks after getting the shot for you to develop immunity. It's also possible for you to get the flu despite getting vaccinated if you were exposed to a flu virus that is very different from the viruses the flu vaccine is designed to protect against.⁵

How effective is the flu shot?

On average, getting the flu vaccine reduces the chance of getting the flu by 40–60% among the overall population.⁶ The "match" between the virus strains that are in the vaccine and those that are "going around" can affect how well the vaccines work each year, as well as underlying individual characteristics.⁶ But, getting a flu shot each year is the single best way to prevent getting the flu.⁵ Even if you do get the flu after having gotten a flu shot, vaccination can help prevent hospitalization, death, and long-term physical decline.⁴ This is especially important for older adults who are more at risk for these serious complications.⁴

Why do I need a flu shot every flu season?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that all people 6 months of age and older should receive an annual flu vaccine.⁵

Flu viruses are constantly changing, and each year's vaccine is updated to try to keep up with these changes.⁵ Also, your immune system doesn't work as well as you age.⁴ For these reasons, an annual vaccination is especially important.

Another benefit of flu vaccination for older adults is that it might reduce the risk of heart attack or stroke.⁷

I've never had the flu before. Why should I get a flu shot this season?

Just because you haven't had the flu before, that does not mean you can't get it this flu season. There is no way to know if you will get flu this year or not, or how severe your illness will be. As you get older, you are at higher risk for complications, including hospitalization or even death.⁵ You also could have problems even after you recover from the flu itself that could impact what you can do in your everyday life.⁵ Bottom line: by getting vaccinated you are not only helping to protect yourself, but also your children, grandchildren, and other loved ones who are around you.⁸

How do I know the flu shot is safe?

Flu vaccines have good safety records. Hundreds of millions of Americans have safely received flu vaccines over the past 50 years, and there has been extensive research supporting the safety of flu vaccines.⁹ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends that all people 6 months of age and older should receive an annual flu vaccine.⁵

Is it true that flu vaccines aren't effective for older adults?

Getting a flu shot every year is the best way to prevent getting the flu.⁵ In recent flu seasons, flu vaccines have not worked as well in older adults as in young, healthy adults.^{10,11} Should you in fact get the flu, vaccination will help reduce the severity of your symptoms and will also help prevent potentially serious complications and/or disability.⁴



1. How to Give a Strong Recommendation to Adult Patients Who Require Vaccination. Medscape. https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/842874_2 2. Misconceptions about Seasonal Flu and Flu Vaccines. Center for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/qa/misconceptions.htm> 3. Immunization in the United States: Recommendations, Barriers, and Measures to Improve Compliance: Part 2: Adult Vaccinations. Pharmacy and Therapeutics. 2016;41(8):492-506. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4959618/> 4. Call to Action: Reinigorating Influenza Prevention in U.S. Adults Age 65 Years and Older. National Foundation for Infectious Diseases. <http://www.nfid.org/flu-older-adults> 5. Key Facts About Seasonal Flu Vaccine. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/keyfacts.htm> 6. Vaccine Effectiveness – How Well Does the Flu Vaccine Work? Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/qa/vaccineeffect.htm> 7. Kwong JC, et al. Acute Myocardial Infarction after Laboratory-Confirmed Influenza Infection. New England Journal of Medicine 2018; 378:345-353. 8. Community Immunity ("Herd Immunity"). The National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID). Vaccines.gov. <https://www.vaccines.gov/basics/protection/index.html> 9. Flu Vaccine Safety Information. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/vaccine/general.htm> 10. Jackson ML, Chung JR, Jackson LA, et al. Influenza Vaccine Effectiveness in the United States during the 2015–2016 Season. The New England Journal of Medicine. 2017;377(6):534-543. doi:10.1056/NEJMoa1700153. 11. Flannery B, Chung JR, Belongia EA, et al. Interim Estimates of 2017–18 Seasonal Influenza Vaccine Effectiveness — United States, February 2018. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2018;67:180–185. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6706a2>