

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

HCPs play an important role in ensuring adults aged 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.¹⁻³ Countering these misperceptions requires hard facts.³

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?

No. Flu shots 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, especially if you were exposed to a flu virus that is very different from the viruses the flu vaccine is designed to protect against.⁵ In addition, even if you do get flu after vaccination, the vaccine still helps reduce your risk of severe illness or death from influenza.⁶

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.^{6,7} 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 your own individual health status.^{5,7} But getting a flu shot each year is the single best way to prevent flu and its serious complications.^{5,6} Even if you do get the flu after having gotten a flu shot, vaccination can help prevent hospitalization, death, and long-term physical decline.^{4,6} 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 may help to reduce the risk of heart attack or stroke.^{6,8}

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

How do I know the flu shot is safe?

Flu vaccines have excellent safety records. Hundreds of millions of Americans have safely received flu vaccines for over 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.^{5,6} Although influenza vaccines do not work as well in older people compared with younger healthy people,¹⁰⁻¹¹ flu vaccinations will help reduce the risk of severe influenza, including the risk of hospitalization and death from influenza.^{4,12} The CDC preferentially recommends the use of higher dose and adjuvanted flu vaccines for adults 65 years and older. If none of the preferred products are available, any other age-appropriate vaccine should be used as per the ACIP recommendations. Please talk to your provider about these vaccines.¹³



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