



Immunizations for Seniors

Three immunizations are recommended for those over the age of 65

Flu shot (short for influenza) is given yearly

Pneumonia vaccine is given once

Tetanus booster is given once every 10 years

All are covered by Medicare

Flu

A yearly flu shot lowers your chances of getting the flu. Even if you do get the flu, if you have been immunized, your symptoms will be less severe and your risk of serious illness will be greatly reduced.

For healthy people over the age of 50 — especially those over the age of 65 — and those with chronic illnesses, who have greater risks of complications if they get sick, immunization against the flu is one of the best preventive measures you can take to stay in good shape.

Vaccinations must be repeated each year because flu viruses change. Every year the flu shot is updated to protect against the most current strains.

The best time to be vaccinated is October or November. It takes about one to two weeks after the shot to develop protection, and flu season typically runs from November-December to April. Since protection only last for six months or so, if you get vaccinated too early, you run the risk of not being protected in late winter.

Be assured that you cannot get the flu from the vaccine, which is made from killed viruses.

For more information, visit the Centers for Disease Control's site [*Flu Facts for Everyone*](#).

Pneumonia

Pneumonia can be deadly. Each year it causes more than 46,000 deaths in the United States -- more than all other vaccine-preventable diseases combined. It is the leading cause of illness and death among seniors.

There are two types of pneumonia — viral pneumonia and bacterial pneumonia. Bacterial pneumonia is the most serious and can be caused by several types of bacteria. Today's pneumonia vaccine is effective against 23 types of pneumococcal bacteria.

The vaccine is recommended for everyone over the age of 65. It is safe and effective, provides long-term protection, and can be given at any time of the year.

Tetanus

Almost everyone was immunized against tetanus as a child. But this protection does not last a lifetime.

Tetanus (also known as lockjaw) is caused by a common bacterium that lives in soil and dust. The bacteria typically enter the body through a deep puncture wound or severe cut, like those made by nails or knives.

Almost every child originally received protection through a series of shots that combined tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis vaccines (DTP).

However, adults must be vaccinated every 10 years to maintain protection against tetanus. This booster shot is given as a combined tetanus-diphtheria vaccine (Td), which also provides protection against the more rare although very serious disease, diphtheria.