

Q & A with Your HQI Pharmacist: Flu and Pneumonia Vaccinations

Answers by Health Quality Innovators Pharmacist Cindy Warriner, BS, RPh, CDCES



Why get vaccinated for flu and pneumonia?

Vaccines prevent serious illness and death from influenza and pneumonia. Flu is a contagious disease most widespread between October and May. Flu vaccines are recommended for persons 6 months old and up. Flu is more dangerous for people over 65 years of age, infants, pregnant people, and people with certain health conditions or weakened immune systems. Having the flu also increases the likelihood of getting pneumonia.¹ In an average year, thousands of people in the United States die from the flu. The vaccine is one of the best prevention tools.²

The pneumonia vaccine is recommended for all adults 50 years of age and older. Vaccines help prevent pneumococcal disease, a potentially serious bacterial lung disease. Pneumonia may lead to other infections including sepsis, which is extremely dangerous. Older adults can also experience confusion when ill. Vaccines are the best way to prevent pneumococcal disease and complications.

Should I get both the flu and pneumonia vaccinations?

Yes! These vaccines are attenuated or NOT live vaccines so they cannot make you sick.

The pneumonia vaccines include: PCV20; PCV21, a new single-dose vaccine; and two additional types of vaccines: PCV15 and PPSV23, which require a series of at least two shots. Your healthcare provider can help choose the best pneumonia vaccine for you.

Currently there are three recommended flu vaccines for people over 65 years old including: the Fluzone High-Dose Quadrivalent, Flublok Quadrivalent, or Fluvad Quadrivalent vaccine. If those are not available, you should receive a standard dose flu vaccine.

When should I receive the flu and pneumonia vaccinations?

The flu vaccine is an annual shot best given in September or October before the typical peak of flu illness in November.³ Flu vaccines are updated annually to ensure the best possible protection, further supporting the need to get a flu shot every year. Immunity from vaccination takes about two weeks to develop.

The pneumonia vaccine can be given any time of the year. Since the flu vaccine is seasonally recommended for the fall, you might want to consider obtaining the pneumonia vaccine in the spring or summer. As with the flu vaccine, the immunity with the pneumonia vaccine takes about two weeks.

What are the side effects from the flu or pneumonia vaccination?

As with any vaccination, there is the possibility of pain, redness or swelling at the injection site. If these problems occur, they usually go away within 2 days. Both shots are given intramuscularly, or in the muscle. "Using" or exercising the muscle immediately after the shot can decrease potential side effects. Examples can include arm circles or lifting a soup can up and down.

Side effects of pneumonia vaccination may also include (in addition to pain, redness and swelling at the injection site) fever, feeling tired, headache, muscle aches or chills. These side effects also usually go away within 2 days. Acetaminophen, if allowed, can be taken 6 hours after the vaccination to ease any discomfort.

¹ [About Pneumococcal Disease | CDC](#)

² [Inactivated Influenza Vaccine Information Statement | CDC](#)

³ [Flu & People 65 Years and Older | CDC](#)

Flu and Pneumonia Vaccination Resources for Additional Information



[Fluzone High-Dose Seasonal Influenza Vaccine | CDC](#)

[Adjuvanted Flu Vaccine | CDC](#)

[Recombinant Influenza \(Flu\) Vaccine | CDC](#)

[Seasonal Influenza Vaccination Resources for Health Professionals | CDC](#)

[Inactivated Influenza Vaccine Information Statement | CDC](#)

[Pneumococcal Vaccine Recommendations | CDC](#)

[Vaccines for Pneumococcal | CDC](#)

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