

Adult Influenza and Pneumococcal Vaccines FAQ

Why should I be concerned about influenza and pneumococcal disease?

- Pneumonia and influenza together are among the top 10 leading causes of death among Georgians over age 65.
- It is estimated that more than 36,000 Americans die each year from influenza-related illness and 40,000 die from pneumococcal infection.
- Pneumococcal pneumonia accounts for 25%-35% of all pneumonias leading to hospitalization; resulting in 7,000 to 13,000 deaths per year in the United States.

How effective is the influenza vaccine?

- Influenza vaccine can prevent illness in approximately 70-90% of healthy people aged less than 65 years.
- Among elderly people living outside of nursing homes or similar chronic-care facilities, influenza vaccine is 30-70% effective in preventing hospitalization for pneumonia and influenza.
- Among elderly persons residing in nursing homes, the vaccine can be 50-60% effective in preventing hospitalization or pneumonia and 80% effective in preventing death.

How can I tell if I have the flu or just a cold?

- To many people "the flu" is any illness with fever and cold symptoms. Influenza (flu) and a cold are both respiratory (breathing) system infections caused by viruses. Initial symptoms of flu and colds are similar, and it can sometimes be difficult to tell if you have the flu or a very bad cold. The flu can cause more serious illness than a common cold. Influenza vaccine only protects against certain influenza viruses and will not protect you from colds or other respiratory infections.

Tips for avoiding the flu and colds

- Your best protection against the flu is an annual flu vaccination.
- You can decrease your chances of getting a cold by frequently washing your hands and avoiding touching your nose, eyes, and mouth. The average adult gets 1-3 respiratory (breathing) illnesses each year, and children get even more. However, it would be unusual to get the flu more than once a year.
- Sometimes you can get a bacterial infection of the middle ear or sinuses at the same time or following a cold or the flu. These bacterial infections can be treated with antibiotics. The flu, however, can lead to more serious complications such as pneumonia and sometimes death.
- People who have the greatest risk of severe complications from flu are those 65 years old and older, those with certain medical conditions, and some young children.

Who should receive influenza vaccine?

- All people age 6 months and older are recommended to receive an annual influenza vaccination.

When should I receive the influenza vaccine?

- Since the flu viruses change constantly, an annual vaccination is recommended. You may receive flu vaccine anytime during the flu season, which typically lasts from November to March. While the best time to get flu vaccine is October or November, getting vaccinated in December or later can still protect you against the flu.

What about pneumococcal vaccines?

- There are two forms of pneumococcal vaccine:
 1. the pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine (PPV23), which provides immunity against 23 strains of pneumococcus in adults, but does not work well for young children under the age of 2.
 2. the pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV13), which works to prevent 13 common strains of pneumococcus that cause disease in young children.

Who should receive pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine (PPV23)?

- All adults who are 65 years of age and older. The vaccine is also recommended for people older than 2 years who have a long-term health problem such as heart disease, sickle cell disease, alcoholism, lung disease including emphysema, diabetes, cirrhosis, or leaks of cerebrospinal fluid. Anyone over 2 years old who has a disease or condition that lowers the body's resistance to infection should also get the pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine. In addition, PPV23 vaccine is recommended for cochlear implant patients..

When should I receive pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine (PPV23)?

- This vaccine can be given at any time during the year and even at the same time as the influenza vaccine. Usually one dose of pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine is all that is needed for healthy people. However, if you received the first dose prior to age 65, it is recommended that you get a single revaccination at age 65 (or older) if it has been at least 5 years since your previous dose. Certain individuals who are immunocompromised may need 2 doses before they are 65 years of age. Ask your doctor for more details.

Other Facts about the Influenza and Pneumococcal Polysaccharide Vaccines

- Both vaccines are covered by Medicare Part B.
- Since the vaccine is made from dead influenza viruses, you cannot get influenza from the flu shot.
- You cannot get influenza or pneumococcal disease from the vaccines.
- Side effects are usually minor and last only a short time. They may include:
 - soreness, redness or swelling where the shot is given
 - fever, muscle aches
- The vaccines will not protect you from other respiratory infections, such as colds and bronchitis which are caused by other viruses or bacteria.
- Influenza vaccine can be given at the same time as other vaccines, including pneumococcal vaccine.

Where can I get vaccinated?

- Call your doctor. Most primary care providers and health maintenance organizations (HMOs) offer flu vaccine from October through March, and pneumococcal disease vaccines throughout the year
- Contact your [local health department](#)
- Search the [Georgia Adult Immunization Coalition](#) web site for a location by county or zip code
- Call the American Lung Association hotline at 1-800-LUNG-USA

Where can I get more information about the vaccines?

- The [Vaccine Information Statement Website](#) provides information on many other vaccines, with translations in a number of different languages.