

Why Your Riverview Aging Parents Need the Flu Shot

Flu season is almost upon us. Nobody likes to get the flu. It often brings nausea, vomiting, fever, chills and aches and pains. Although shots are not pleasant, it is imperative, with a few exceptions, that your Riverview aging parents get the flu shot.

Why?

According to [USA TODAY](#), fewer than half of Americans are being vaccinated against the flu which kills an average of more than 30,000 people a year. It can be particularly fatal among the older population with about 90% of deaths occurring in people ages 65 years and older. The immune system of seniors isn't as strong as in younger people. Your parents may say: "I don't want to get a flu shot because it will give me the flu" or "I don't need a flu shot."

Let us arm you with some information to dispel some myths about the flu from [WebMD](#).

Myths About the Flu

1. **The flu shot causes the flu.** According to Dr. Christine Hay, assistant professor at the University of Rochester Medical Center "there is simply no way that the flu vaccine can give you the flu. The injection contains a dead virus and the dead virus can't infect you." Because the flu shot is often administered in the cold and flu season, some people will get the flu a couple of days after receiving the shot. If so, it is a coincidence!
2. **There is no treatment for the flu.** However, both Tamiflu (in pill form) and Relenza (which is inhaled) are effective if taken within 48 hours after symptoms appear. They are not a cure, but can reduce the amount of time you are sick and make you less contagious to others.
3. **You can only get the flu once a year.** Unfortunately, for those susceptible to influenza, you can get the flu multiple times a year depending on the strain.
4. **You don't need the flu shot every year.** Unlike the measles vaccine, which you only need twice in your lifetime, you need a new seasonal flu vaccine every year. Why? Because the flu strains change every year. Every single year, researchers have to develop a brand new vaccine. A person's immune protection from vaccination declines over time, so an annual vaccination is needed to get the "optimal" or best protection against the flu.
5. **Cold weather causes the flu.** Does going out in the cold without proper warm clothing cause the flu? Despite what your grandmother may have told you, the answer is no. While there might seem to be a connection -- since flu season coincides with colder months in the U.S. -- there isn't. The problem may be with cold weather, everyone is stuck inside and there's a higher risk of being exposed.

Facts About Flu Shots

1. The flu vaccine now comes in shot form, a nasal mist (available to people ages 2 to 49), a needle free shot and a shot that uses shorter needles.

2. Seniors need the flu shot plus the pneumonia shot. The Center for Disease Control is “calling for senior citizens to get a second type of vaccine against pneumococcus, a bacteria that can cause pneumonia and that hospitalizes about 50,000 Americans a year.”
3. Flu vaccines cause antibodies to develop in the body about two weeks after a vaccination. These antibodies provide protection against an infection with the viruses that are in the vaccine.
4. Flu season usually begins in October and can last as long as May. In fact, the flu often doesn’t hit its peak until February or sometimes as late as March.

Who Shouldn’t Get a Flu Shot

According to the [Center for Disease Control](#), there are people who should not receive a flu shot. These include:

1. Children under 6 months of age.
2. People with severe, life-threatening allergies to the flu vaccine or any ingredient in the vaccine. This might include gelatin, antibiotics, or other ingredients.

People who should talk to their doctor before getting the flu shot:

- If you have an allergy to eggs or any of the ingredients in the vaccine. Talk to your doctor about your allergy.
- If you ever had Guillain-Barré Syndrome (a severe paralyzing illness, also called GBS). Some people with a history of GBS should not get this vaccine. Talk to your doctor about your GBS history.

At FirstLight HomeCare of Southern Hillsborough County, the health of your aging parents is our utmost concern. Our job as in-home caregivers is to keep your loved ones as healthy and happy as possible.

By the way – you need a flu shot too!