

What is pneumococcal disease?

Pneumococcal disease is an infection caused by a certain type of bacteria. When these bacteria invade the lungs, they cause bacterial pneumonia. The bacteria can also attack the bloodstream (bacteremia) and/or the brain (meningitis). The infection kills thousands of people in the United States each year, most of them older adults. Typical symptoms of pneumococcal pneumonia include high fever, cough with chest pain and mucus, shaking chills, breathlessness, and chest pain that increases with breathing. Older adults sometimes experience changes in level of consciousness or confusion. The symptoms of pneumococcal meningitis include stiff neck, fever, confusion and disorientation, and avoidance of light. The symptoms of pneumococcal bacteremia include a combination of pneumonia, meningitis and arthritis.

How is pneumococcal disease prevented?

There is a vaccine to protect against pneumococcal disease. The vaccine is safe and effective, and one shot lasts most people a lifetime.

Who should get the pneumococcal vaccine?

- ◆ People who are 65 or older.
- ◆ People with chronic illness or whose body has a compromised ability to fight infection.
- ◆ Residents of chronic-care facilities.

What are the side effects of the pneumococcal vaccine?

Some people have mild side effects from the shot, but these usually last only a short time. When side effects do occur, the most common include swelling and soreness at the injection site. A few people experience fever and muscle pain. You cannot get pneumococcal disease from the vaccine.

The Silvercrest Center for Nursing and Rehabilitation

is a unique center of excellence, dedicated to Giving Quality to Life for all whom it serves, including:

- ◆ Older and younger adults who are chronically ill or traumatized and who make Silvercrest their home.
- ◆ People who need rehabilitation before returning to an independent life.
- ◆ Ventilator-dependent patients who require weaning from ventilation.
- ◆ People with Alzheimer's Disease and other dementias who need a nurturing and safe environment that promotes functioning.

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The
Silvercrest
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Giving Quality to Life

About Influenza (the Flu) & Pneumococcal Disease

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Many of our residents, patients and family members have questions about two common infections—influenza and pneumococcal disease. Because both these diseases pose especially serious risk for the residents and patients at Silvercrest (older adults, people with chronic disease, and those who live in chronic-care facilities), it is important that you learn more about these diseases, as well as the importance of being immunized against them. Family members, too, should be immunized so as to avoid exposing their loved ones to infection.

What is influenza?

Viruses that infect the respiratory tract cause influenza or the “flu.” Influenza is spread through the air or by direct contact, and often causes a more severe illness than the common cold. Typical symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, headache, muscle aches, and fatigue.

Who is at risk for influenza?

While everyone is at risk, the disease and its complications can be especially harmful for older adults and for those with chronic illnesses. The most common complication of influenza is pneumonia.

How many people get seriously ill from influenza?

In an average year, influenza is associated with about 20,000 deaths nationwide and many more hospitalizations.

Can influenza be prevented?

The best protection against the flu is an annual influenza vaccination, which has been shown to reduce hospitalization by about 70% and death by about 85% in the free-living elderly. Among nursing home residents, the vaccine can reduce the risk of hospitalization by about 50%, the risk of pneumonia by about 60%, and the risk of death by 75% to 80%.

When is the best time to get your flu shot?

The best time to get vaccinated is early October to mid-November. However, if you miss your flu shot in November it is still not too late to obtain one. It takes approximately two weeks after vaccination to develop antibodies against the flu to provide protection. Flu season generally begins in December and peaks between January and March.

Why is it necessary to get a new flu shot every year?

Different influenza strains circulate every flu season. Based on government recommendations, manufacturers develop each year’s vaccine with the three strains of influenza that scientists have predicted to be most common in the coming flu season. The strains from one year’s vaccine cannot offer immunity to the strains that predominate the following year. In addition, vaccine-induced immunity decreases after a few months.

Who should be vaccinated for influenza?

- ◆ People who are 65 years and older.
- ◆ People with chronic illness, especially of the circulatory or respiratory systems (including asthma).
- ◆ People who have a lowered immunity and compromised ability to fight infection.
- ◆ Residents of nursing homes and other chronic-care or long-term care facilities.
- ◆ Women who will be in the second or third trimester of pregnancy during a flu season.
- ◆ Children from 6 months to 5 years old.
- ◆ Employees who can transmit influenza to persons at high risk, such as healthcare workers and those who work in long-term care facilities.
- ◆ People who are in close contact with anyone who is at high risk.
- ◆ Anyone who wishes to avoid the flu.

What are the side effects of the influenza vaccine?

The most frequent side effect of vaccination is soreness at the injection site. Occasionally, some people experience a period of mild fever and fatigue for a day or two after the shot. Rarely, an allergic reaction may occur. You cannot get influenza from the vaccine.

Who should NOT get the influenza vaccine?

Individuals with egg allergies or those who have had a previous vaccine-associated allergic reaction should avoid immunization. Adults with acute febrile illnesses should usually wait until their symptoms lessen before seeking vaccination. However, the shot may be given in the presence of minor illnesses, with or without fever, particularly among children with mild upper respiratory tract infections or allergic rhinitis. If you are sick, check with your doctor if you can still get the flu shot or if you should wait until your symptoms lessen or resolve.