

## Vaccines for Those Over 50

The following information reflects recommendations by AARP and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). If you have allergies to any components of the vaccines, be sure to check with your doctor before getting a shot. Thanks to Victor Heinrich, NC Senior Tar Heel Legislature Delegate for Carteret County, for sharing this information.

There are four vaccinations that every adult needs, and a couple more that may be needed for those with certain risk factors. Interestingly, what is not listed below are measles and chicken pox vaccines because anyone born before 1957 in all likelihood grew up at a time when measles was so prevalent that immunity as an adult is assumed. Similarly, most adults over the age of 40 have immunity to chicken pox from having been exposed as a child. If you believe you weren't exposed to chicken pox, ask your doctor about getting the vaccine now.

The shots listed here are available at doctors' offices, pharmacies, places of employment, health clinics and other locations—and they are covered by most health insurance plans.

- **Influenza vaccine.** All adults need this vaccine every year, regardless of age. Flu season typically runs from October through March, and it is recommended that you get your flu shot by the end of October. It takes about two weeks after a vaccination for the antibodies to develop that you need to fight off the flu, which can lead to hospitalization and even death—and seniors are the most vulnerable.

Talk to your doctor if you have had a severe reaction to a flu shot, are allergic to eggs, have had Guillain-Barré syndrome or have a fever. In the case of a fever, you may have to wait until your temperature is back to normal.

Even if you have a flu shot, it is still possible to get the flu, but it may lessen the severity of your illness.

- **Pneumococcal vaccine (pneumonia).** Healthy adults 65 years or older and adults 19-64 who smoke or have health problems such as chronic lung or heart disease, leukemia, lymphoma or alcoholism should get his vaccine. The CDC recommends two pneumococcal vaccines for healthy adults 65 and older—a dose of the pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV13), then a dose of pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine (PPSV23) one year later. Those who have any of the risk factors above should get one dose each of PCV13 and PPSV23 before age 65, separated by eight weeks.

Pneumococcal disease, which can cause pneumonia, kills more people in the U.S. each year than all other vaccine-preventable diseases combined. Young children and those over 65 have the highest incidence of serious illness, and older adults are more likely to die from it. Experts estimate PCV13 prevented more than 30,000 cases of invasive pneumococcal disease and 3,000 deaths in its first three years of use. If you spend time in the presence of chronically ill people, you should get the vaccine, even if you're healthy.

- **Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis) vaccine and/or the Td (tetanus, diphtheria) booster.** The Tdap vaccine came out in 2005, and in addition to protecting against tetanus and diphtheria, protects against whooping cough (also known as pertussis). If you can't remember ever getting this shot, you probably need it. As a bonus, this serves as one of the Td boosters you're supposed to get every 10 years (the one you always worry about when you step on a rusty nail).

You need to get the Tdap only once, and then keep it current by the every-10-years Td booster to be sure you are protected against tetanus and diphtheria. Because of the rise in whooping cough cases, Tdap is a shot you should not skip even if you are over 65. In addition, this vaccine is important for people who have close contact with infants younger than 12 months of age, including parents, grandparents and child care providers.

- **Shingles (herpes zoster) vaccine.** The CDC recommends that those 50 and older get the new shingles vaccine, Shingrix, even if they had the earlier

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