

## “Flu and Pneumonia Season Ahead”

The summer is fading fast. Soon we will have our beautiful leaf season this fall and winter will be upon us before we know it – and with it flu and pneumonia season. It is time to start thinking about vaccinations for these two infections that are highly recommended, especially for certain groups of people, such as those prone to respiratory conditions (Asthma and COPD), and the elderly. Controlled studies have repeatedly shown that getting these vaccines will reduce your chance of getting the disease, or can mitigate and lessen the symptoms if you do.

Talk to your healthcare provider for more details about these vaccines, but I encourage you to seriously consider the flu vaccine every year, and the pneumonia vaccine if you meet certain criteria.

Influenza is a virus that has killed millions of people worldwide throughout history, as recently as the WWI era. In many under developed countries today, it can still cause a deadly, dreaded epidemic. The CDC in Atlanta is already perfecting the vaccine for this coming flu season, and as always, it will be designed to cover the three most likely strains expected to circulate in the United States.

This vaccine is recommended every year, as it changes each year based on the most likely strains expected. You should get the vaccine once available by the end of October, if possible, or for sure by mid-November. The peak flu season always seems to be December thru March, and you want to have the vaccine on board before that time.

There are two significant changes with regards to the upcoming flu season. The CDC is recommending you do NOT use the nasal spray version this year, because there are questions about its effectiveness. Also, they are changing the way the vaccine is made so that people with “egg allergies” are less likely to have problems. A great website for more information is [cdc.gov/flu](http://cdc.gov/flu)

Pneumococcal pneumonia is a bacterial infection caused by several different organisms. The vaccine comes in two forms: PCV (Prevnar) – 13, and PPSV (Pneumovax) – 23. They are highly recommended for those over 65 in general, and those younger especially if you are a smoker, or have certain conditions such as COPD, Asthma, or other diseases which reduce the effectiveness of your immune system.

If you are 65 or older and have never had Prevnar-13, get that first and follow a year later with a Pneumovax dose. If you have had Prevnar-13, wait a year from that shot and get a Pneumovax. In other words, you need both to be fully protected. There is good information available and frequently asked questions answered at the CDC website [cdc.gov/vaccines](http://cdc.gov/vaccines)

While some people have mixed emotions about preventive vaccines, studies show that they are highly effective. Are they 100% right on? Of course not. But, they can and will help most people. Have a good discussion with your provider and consider their advice.

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