

Your Health Voice

IT'S MORE THAN AH-CHOO! FLU SEASON REMINDERS FOR SENIORS



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HEALTH- There have been at least 15 million flu illnesses and 8,200 deaths in the United States from the flu so far this season, according to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC), and every year, the flu kills roughly 35,000 Americans—that's a lot of coughing, sneezing and feeling run down! New Yorkers of all ages need to stay mindful and protect themselves from airborne illnesses like the flu, and the [coronavirus](#), both of which are making headlines across the globe these days.

Because the body's immune defenses weaken with age, seniors are at increased risk for catching the flu, which can lead to serious health complications, such as pneumonia and other life-threatening conditions.

As a Registered Nurse with the [Visiting Nurse Service of New York](#), I work to help the older New Yorkers in my care, and their family caregivers, understand the risks associated with the influenza virus what they can do to stay healthy and flu-free.

Flu prevention isn't complicated, and most of us have heard the drill a thousand times, but it's important to remember that a few simple measures can help keep you and your loved ones from being side-lined by serious illness as the 2020 flu season shifts into high gear:

First Line of Defense

The best way to protect yourself and your loved ones from the flu is to get your yearly flu shot. Getting the flu vaccine not only protects you, but also prevents you from spreading the flu to your loved ones.

The CDC recommends that people [six months of age](#) and older should get a flu vaccine as soon as the current season's vaccines are available. Medicare will cover the flu vaccine once every flu season, while many local pharmacies and community organizations in your area provide free flu shots.

People ages 65 and older should especially be vaccinated, as the flu can worsen symptoms of [chronic conditions](#) that many seniors are already living with.

Recognize Your Symptoms

Unlike a cold that comes on gradually, the flu begins suddenly with a headache, chills, and a cough. Make sure you're aware of flu symptoms which can be often mistaken for a simple stomach bug or the common cold, and contact your care provider if symptoms worsen or you are at high risk of flu complications:

- *Chills and shakes with the fever

- *Extreme fatigue

- *Headaches and body aches

- *Dry, hacking cough

- *Sore throat

- *Vomiting and Belly Pain

Practice Good Health Habits

There are several everyday steps you can take to ensure that you don't those around you or worsen your symptoms. These are all tips that we've heard before at some point or another, but they remain important to keep in mind:

- *Wash your hands often with antibacterial soap and water, especially after you cough, sneeze, or shake hands.

- *Avoid close contact with sick people.

- *Avoid touching your face! Habits like touching your eyes can act as a welcoming mat for the flu virus.

- *Drink plenty of fluids and eat healthful foods rich in vitamins such as citrus, like grapefruits and tangerines.

- *Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, and throw away the tissue immediately after use.

If you have not had a flu shot, wear a surgical [face mask](#) to prevent viral transmission that can be caused by coughing, sneezing, or speaking.

Drink plenty of water and other clear fluids to avoid dehydration.

Contact your doctor right away if you start to feel flu-like symptoms.

Rest for at least an additional 24 hours after the flue subsides in order for your body to regain strength.

To learn more, please visit www.VNSNY.org or call 1-800-675-0391.