

Pneumonia vaccine effective in any season

Pneumonia can be deadly to older Americans, and it can strike at any time of year, according to Quality Insights of Pennsylvania, the state's Medicare Quality Improvement Organization.

Fortunately, seniors can fight back in spring, summer, fall or winter by getting the pneumonia shot.

“Some people get the pneumonia vaccination when they get their annual flu shot because that's when they remember to do it,” said David Wenner, DO, Quality Insights of Pennsylvania Medical Director. “And while pneumonia is a common complication of the flu, you don't have to have the flu to contract the illness. So any time of the year is the right time to get the pneumonia shot.”

And the price is right, too. Medicare pays for the shot if it's ordered by a physician and you are enrolled in Medicare Part B.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that everyone age 65 and older get the pneumonia shot. The immune system weakens with age, making it harder to fight off the deadly illness.

“The pneumonia shot is doubly important for seniors with diabetes because diabetes weakens the immune system even more,” according to Wenner. “And people suffering from a chronic illness, whether diabetes, heart disease, lung disease or cancer, should get the pneumonia shot even if they are not yet 65..”

Unlike the flu shot, which should be received yearly, most seniors need only one pneumococcal vaccination in their lifetime. The shot offers protection for at least five years. Wenner encourages you to ask your doctor if and when you will need a booster. And ask your doctor where to get the pneumonia shot. Many physicians give the shot in their offices, and every hospital offers them. Public health departments and urgent care centers also frequently offer the shot.

Pneumococcal pneumonia kills more people every year than all other vaccine preventable diseases combined, according to the CDC. They estimate that as many as 40,000 Americans die from pneumonia each year. The pneumonia shot can save your life. Check with your doctor to see if you need the pneumonia vaccine today.

For more information on the pneumonia vaccine visit www.cdc.gov.

Quality Insights of Pennsylvania, under contract with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), protects Medicare patients' rights and works collaboratively with hospitals and other health care providers in Pennsylvania to assist them in their efforts to improve the quality of the care they deliver. Quality Insights of Pennsylvania's affiliate corporations include the West Virginia Medical Institute, Quality Insights of Delaware and Quality Insights Renal Network Three in New Jersey. To learn more about this nonprofit organization, visit www.qipa.org. CMS is an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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