

Senior Scene



What to know about seniors and vaccines

Parents know that vaccination is a big part of caring for young children. The American Academy of Pediatrics advises parents to vaccinate children against a host of diseases and conditions in the first 12 to 18 months of a child's life. The AAP notes that early immunization helps children build immunity at the best time — before they're exposed to germs that can make them very sick.

The effectiveness of vaccines in relation to protecting young children is well documented, but what about seniors and vaccines? Are immunizations still a vital part of a wellness routine when adults reach their golden years? The National Institute on Aging advises older adults to speak with their doctors or pharmacists about the vaccines they need, which may help to prevent or reduce the severity of various diseases.

COVID-19

The NIA notes that age is a risk factor for serious illness from COVID-19. Due to the relative infancy of COVID-19, researchers are still learning about the effectiveness of vaccines against new variants of the virus. But older adults are more likely to get seriously ill from COVID-19

than younger people, so it's imperative seniors discuss immunization against the virus with their physicians.

Influenza

The World Health Organization notes that the flu kills as many as 650,000 people across the globe each year. A 2009 study published in the journal *Influenza and Other Respiratory Viruses* indicated that most deaths associated with influenza in industrialized countries occur among seniors age 65 and older. The flu is easily transmitted from one person to another and the NIA advises everyone age six months and older to get an annual flu vaccine. While the protection from a flu vaccine can lessen over time, particularly in older adults, a flu shot still reduces the likelihood of serious illness and/or hospitalization. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that seniors age 65 and older receive a higher-dose flu vaccine or an adjuvanted flu vaccine, the latter of which helps to create a stronger immune response than a normal flu shot. Seniors are urged to speak with their physicians about which flu shot is right for them.

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV)

The NIA indicates

that RSV is a common virus that often produces mild, cold-like symptoms. But older adults should know that they are at higher risk of developing severe symptoms if they are infected with RSV. The NIA notes RSV can be particularly dangerous for older adults with chronic diseases or weakened immune systems.

Hospitalization or even death can occur after severe RSV symptoms develop. RSV vaccines can prevent serious health problems, and the CDC urges seniors to speak with their physicians regarding immunization. Doing so prior to peak RSV infection season, which is fall and winter, is ideal.

Pneumococcal disease

The CDC advises that all adults age 50 and older get pneumococcal vaccination. Pneumococcal disease is a serious infection that the NIA notes often causes pneumonia in the lungs. The risk of getting very sick and even dying from pneumococcal disease is

higher among older adults than younger people. There are different forms of the pneumococcal vaccine, and seniors can speak to their physicians about which one is best for them.

Immunization schedules begin shortly after birth, and seniors still have much to gain from being vaccinated.

Hazards that compromise senior safety at home

Homes are supposed to be sanctuaries where people can be comfortable and live independently. However, houses that are completely suitable for younger populations often harbor hidden threats that can compromise senior safety. At Heart Home Care notes aging in place remains a top priority for more than 90 percent of older Americans, but only 10 percent of modern homes feature the necessary modifications to safely support aging residents.

Falls pose a significant threat to seniors. Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicates falls are the leading cause of both fatal and non-fatal injuries among adults age 65 and older.

More than 14 million seniors experience a fall each year. The Hospital for Special Surgery notes that around 60 percent of these incidents happen right in the home. Knowledge of the potential hazards lurking at home may help seniors identify the areas where they need to be especially cautious.

Bathroom surfaces

Bathrooms are notorious for posing an injury risk because of slippery surfaces. Wet tile and pooled water can be a recipe for hazardous conditions. These conditions are made even worse in spaces that are not equipped with non-skid mats or anchored grab bars.

Lighting
Inadequate lighting can be a hazard

to seniors, many of whom experience diminished vision. Dimly lit staircases, bedrooms and dark hallways can impair spatial awareness. Without enough light, navigating the changes in flooring or obstacles can become a challenge.

Tripping hazards

Many things can cause seniors to trip and fall. Loose area rugs, exposed electrical cords, cluttered hallways, and too much furniture can make it difficult to safely navigate a space.

Cooking hazards

The National Council on Aging says adults over 65 are 3.5 times more likely to die in residential fires than the

general population. Cooking accidents and loose clothing or items catching fire near stovetops are a fire hazard. Seniors also may feel the cold more, and rely on space heaters or other less safe heating units to stay warm, which in turn increases the risk of a fire at home.

Many experts recommend a safety overhaul to secure a home for aging residents. Clearing all floor obstructions, securing loose carpets, installing bright lights, and anchoring heavy furniture are some steps that can be taken to keep a home a haven for older adults rather than a hazard.



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