



Vaccines can lead to a 'Healthier Tomorrow'



Many people think that shots are just for children, but this is not true. Have you ever had the flu or pneumonia? Have you ever been so ill and just wished that there was something that you could do to prevent it? There is one thing that can help reduce your chances of getting the flu

and pneumonia. One of the "Ten Keys"™ to Healthy Aging is "Get Regular Immunizations."

Did you know that pneumonia and influenza, commonly known as the "flu," can both be life threatening? Every year the flu is responsible for about 40,000 deaths and pneumonia is responsible for about 36,000 deaths. Immunizations should be part of everyone's plan for good health.

Facts about the Flu

The flu is a contagious illness that affects the respiratory system (lungs). The flu is caused by a virus. The flu is quite common but it could have dangerous complications for children under 5 and adults who are 65 and older. There are two types of flu vaccines:

One type of flu vaccine contains three dead viruses. These viruses have been identified by the World Health Organization to be the most serious for the upcoming flu season. The flu vaccine allows the body to build up antibodies that will help to fight off the flu when you come in contact with it. This vaccine helps your body protect itself when it comes in contact with flu virus. In other words, if you happen to contract the virus and you are vaccinated against it, your antibodies will attack the virus so that you either do not get sick or your symptoms are mild.

The second type of flu vaccine contains a live, but weakened virus. This is available for people ages 2 to age 49. It also protects the body from the deadly flu virus. You may experience mild flu symptoms because the vaccine contains a live virus.

The flu season usually begins in October and lasts until May. The best time to get your flu shot is in October or November. The flu virus can change each year; therefore, it is recommended that adults 50 years and over receive the flu vaccine each year. The vaccine helps your body fight against the current strain of the virus so it can keep you healthy.

Facts about Pneumonia

Pneumonia is an infection or inflammation in the lungs. The infection or inflammation causes fluid to build up in the lungs which causes the lungs to not function properly. Pneumonia can be caused by both viruses and bacteria.

The pneumonia vaccine is recommended for adults who are 65 and older. The pneumonia vaccine protects people from the complications of streptococcus pneumonia. Most people only need to receive one pneumonia vaccine in their lifetime unless your doctor tells you otherwise.

How to Reduce Your Risk for Pneumonia and the Flu

There are several ways to reduce your risk of getting the flu and pneumonia even if you are vaccinated such as:

- Wash hands before eating and after going outside
- Wash hands frequently, especially when handling food, after using the restroom, and when you know someone around you is sick
- Eat plenty of fruit and vegetables
- Increase oxygen to your body through brisk walking and other aerobic exercise.
- Do not smoke
- When coughing cover your mouth and nose with a tissue and wash your hands
- Avoid shaking hands and being close to people who are sick
- Stay home when you are sick so you avoid spreading the illness to others
- Ask family and friends to stay home when sick
- Keep your hands away from your nose, mouth and eyes

It is important to remember that no vaccine can guarantee you complete protection from an illness. Getting a flu shot or pneumonia shot can help to reduce your chances of getting the illness and can make your symptoms milder. Vaccines can also help prevent life threatening complications if you would contract the virus or the bacteria. The best way to keep yourself healthy and to reduce your chance of illness is to be educated and informed. Keeping a good record of your immunizations is helpful to yourself and to your doctor so that they can make sure you have all of the immunizations you need. Immunizations can lead you to a "Healthier Tomorrow".

(Reference: www.cdc.gov/vaccines)

This column was written by Melissa Woodall, Center for Healthy Aging Student Intern and Senior at Slippery Rock University majoring in Community Health.

CHA is a part of the Department of Epidemiology in the Graduate School of Public Health at the University of Pittsburgh. It is one of 33 Prevention Research Centers in the United States funded by the Center for Disease Control. For questions and more information contact David J. Fetterman, Community Outreach Coordinator & Director of Education at the Center for Healthy Aging at 412-383-3121 or visit www.healthyaging.pitt.edu.