

Why Vaccines Are Important for Seniors With Diabetes

As you age, your immune system weakens, which puts you at a higher risk of contracting certain diseases. If you have diabetes, you need to be aware that your risk may be higher. Every year, people become sick and may die from diseases that could have been prevented with vaccines. Vaccines are also called “immunizations.”



Major vaccines recommended for adults in the United States include:^{1,2}

1. Flu (Influenza vaccine)
2. Pneumonia (Pneumococcal vaccine)
3. Hepatitis B
4. Shingles (Zoster vaccine)
5. Whooping cough (Tdap vaccine)

Protect Yourself and Others

When you get a vaccine, you not only protect yourself, you also help protect others and reduce the spread of disease. Some people, such as infants and cancer patients, are not able to get certain vaccines because of their age or health, so they rely on you to help limit the spread of disease. For example, whooping cough can be very dangerous or even deadly for infants.

What Vaccines You May Need

Getting a vaccine is part of staying healthy because it can prevent illness, disability, and even death. Vaccines that you need as an adult depend on several factors:

- Age
- Travel
- Lifestyle
- Health conditions
- Job
- Vaccines you have already received

Senior adults with health problems may not be able to get certain vaccines.

Medicare Coverage for Recommended Vaccines³

Medicare Part B will pay for the following vaccines:

- Flu
- Pneumonia
- Hepatitis B (covered if you’re at medium or high risk; diabetes increases your risk)

Except for vaccines covered under Medicare Part B, Medicare Part D plans may cover commercially available vaccines, such as the shingles and whooping cough vaccines.

Know the Facts

Flu

- During the 2017–2018 season, the flu caused an estimated **959,000 hospitalizations** and **79,400 deaths**.⁴
- Seniors accounted for **70% of hospital visits** and **90% of deaths** related to influenza.⁴
- The flu vaccine can vary in how well it works, but it is the **best defense** against getting the flu virus. A flu shot can also reduce or prevent other illnesses, trips to your doctor or hospital, and sick days from work.⁵
- Remember that it takes **two weeks** for shots to take effect.⁶

Pneumonia

- Pneumonia-related diseases caused about **544,000 emergency department visits** in 2015 and approximately **49,000 deaths** in 2016.⁷
- It is estimated that as of March 2018, **69% of adults 65 years and older** had received a vaccination for pneumonia.⁸
- The pneumonia vaccine **protects against infections** in the lungs and bloodstream.

Hepatitis B

- Based on 2012 reports, an estimated **847,000 persons** in the United States are living with hepatitis B.⁹
- In 2016, more than 27% of reported hepatitis B cases were for patients 55 years and older. That same year, **2.7% of patients with this disease died**.⁹
- Compared with the general population, people with Type 1 or Type 2 diabetes have **higher rates of hepatitis B**.²

Shingles

- Shingles is a form of chicken pox virus that causes a **painful red rash** on the skin around your joints.
- Adults 60 years and older should receive the shingles vaccine. Those who have already had shingles can receive the vaccine to reduce the risk of getting it again.

Whooping Cough

- In 2018, whooping cough (also known as Pertussis) infected more than **13,000 people**, with **22.6%** of cases appearing in **adults over 20 years old**.¹⁰
- Any adult caring for an infant should get the whooping cough booster, as babies under 2 months cannot receive this vaccination.

Talk with your health care provider to decide which vaccines are best for you.

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