



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

This Cold and Flu Season, join the fight! Be a Flu Fighter.

Sterling, Colo. – October 13, 2020: This year seems like superheroes are needed more than ever. It's time we all join the fight against flu by becoming a Flu Fighter. And as a public health hero, getting a flu shot should be part of this month's action plan. What makes it even more imperative is the increase in COVID-19 cases and many doctors warning that this year's cold and flu season could be even worse because of both viruses being present. It's especially important for adults 65 or older, who account for most of the hospitalizations and deaths from both flu and COVID-19 alike.

Annual flu vaccination is recommended for everyone 6 months of age and older, because it is an effective way to decrease flu illnesses, hospitalizations, and deaths overall. This year in particular, because of the pandemic, there is already additional stress to our healthcare system and other critical infrastructures. Therefore, keeping flu cases from over taxing those systems will be a priority for every community. This is

particularly crucial for rural Colorado, where there is a lower capacity to support an influx of very sick people.

While flu seasons vary in severity, during most seasons, people 65 years and older bear the greatest burden of severe flu disease. It is estimated that 70 to 85 percent of seasonal flu-related deaths have occurred in people 65 years and older, and between 50 to 70 percent seasonal flu-related hospitalizations. With COVID-19 also affecting older adults this puts added significance on that population getting vaccinated.

Most people will get better without needing hospitalization (both from Flu and COVID-19), but some people get very sick and older adults are especially likely to get dangerously ill from catching the flu. This risk is due, in part, to changes in immune defenses with increasing age as well as other health conditions. It also means that those that are around older adults, young children and those who have a compromised immune system should also get their flu shot. For the 2017-2018 flu season, the CDC estimates that vaccination prevented about 700,000 influenza cases and 65,000 hospitalizations, for adults aged 65 and older. This is, in part, due to the rest of the population that also chose to get a flu shot. This is where herd immunity comes in—if a person has the flu but is around people who have been vaccinated against influenza, the virus has no “host” to transfer to and thus the spread of disease ends.

To provide more effective vaccination to aging immune systems, vaccine makers have developed “stronger” vaccines against the flu called “high-dose” immunization which is especially designed for older adults. They are designed to increase the immune system’s response to the vaccine. Most research studies to date show that these stimulate aging

immune systems to produce more antibodies to influenza. There's also some evidence that these vaccines reduce the risk of being hospitalized for influenza. So if you are an older adult, or if you're trying to arrange a flu shot for an aging relative, go for one of the vaccines designed for older adults.

Older adults should also make sure they are up-to-date on the pneumococcal vaccination. This is a one-time vaccination, not yearly, that helps reduce the risk of certain types of bacterial pneumonia and other potential complications of influenza. Your primary care provider can answer questions you may have about vaccines and your existing healthcare status.

Join the fight! It's important for all of us, young and old, to be the protectors for ourselves, our loved ones and our community by getting a flu shot. Become a Flu Fighter by contacting your local pharmacy, doctor's office or call the Northeast Colorado Health Department about getting vaccinated today.

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