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Let's Focus on Increasing Vaccination Rates Among Patients 65 Years of Age and Older

We've called on medical staff to assess the immune status of all patients 65 years of age and older and administer influenza and pneumococcal vaccines to all those eligible. To simplify the vaccination process, we have issued standing orders, empowering **the appropriate medical staff** to assess and immunize eligible patients.

Older patients are at increased risk for serious complications and even death from influenza and pneumococcal infections. Immunize all those at risk no matter where they present and before discharge.

While this call to action is focused primarily on patients 65 years of age and older, it is important to note that health-care providers should continue to vaccinate people under age 65 years also at high risk of complications from these diseases. In addition, health-care providers need to seek immunization for themselves to help further prevent the spread of influenza to their vulnerable patients.

Meeting national health objectives is the goal

Healthy People 2010, an initiative of the US Department of Health and Human Services, has established a national goal of 90 percent immunization against influenza and pneumococcal disease in adults aged 65 years and older. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) calls this a "key public health strategy" that will prevent substantial morbidity and mortality in older Americans.

Help protect at-risk patients aged 65+ years

All medical staff are to focus on protecting our high-risk patients by working to meet these national immunization goals. Immunization is the best proven prevention method for influenza and pneumococcal disease. Every one of our patients should be informed, have his or her immunization status evaluated and have an opportunity to be vaccinated, if necessary.

Influenza and pneumococcal disease have greatest impact on patients aged 65+ years

Influenza is estimated to kill 36,000 Americans every year; more than 90 percent of them are 65 years of age or older. In an average year, influenza also hospitalizes more than 226,000 Americans.

Deaths from pneumococcal disease are also most common in elderly persons. For example, even with appropriate treatment, pneumococcal sepsis is fatal for 30 to 40 percent of elderly patients who get it. Pneumococcal infections are also becoming more antibiotic resistant, which makes effective treatment even more difficult, increases costs and provides another compelling reason to prevent cases through widespread vaccination.

Vaccination best proven method for protecting those 65 years of age and older

The CDC recommends influenza vaccination every year for those 65 years of age and older, beginning as early as September. Vaccination should continue throughout the fall and even into January, February and beyond because in most years influenza virus circulation peaks in February or March.

In addition, vaccination is recommended for children 6-23 months of age, adults aged 50-64 years and anyone aged 2 to 49 years with certain underlying risk factors, including chronic heart or lung disease and diabetes. Close contacts of high-risk persons also should be immunized, including health-care workers and out-of-home caregivers.

It is important for **our** staff to remember to seek immunization against influenza and pneumococcal disease for themselves, as well as their high-risk patients. Studies have documented health-care workers commonly spread the deadly influenza virus to vulnerable patients who are at increased risk for serious complications and even death, including those 65+.

The CDC also recommends pneumococcal vaccination be administered to everyone aged 65 years and older at any time of the year. Those vaccinated before age 65 years of age should be revaccinated after five years have passed and they are over age 65 years of age. Patients over age 65 years who cannot recall or confirm receiving the vaccine should be immunized.

Because they have significant value as preventive care, Medicare pays for influenza and pneumococcal vaccines and their administration. In fact, administration fees for these vaccines have been increased significantly in the past year.

For more information

For more information, visit www.cdc.gov.