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# What You Should Know and Do this Flu Season If You Are 65 Years and Older:

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## Actions To Take This Flu Season

### 1. Get Your Seasonal Flu Shot

The best way to prevent seasonal flu is by getting a seasonal flu vaccination each year. As always, CDC recommends that people 65 and older get their regular, or “seasonal,” flu vaccine as soon as it is available. This year is no exception as seasonal flu viruses are expected to circulate along with 2009 H1N1 viruses this flu season. When the 2009 H1N1 vaccine becomes available for people 65 years and older, you should get that vaccine also.

2. Take Everyday Preventive Actions including covering coughs, washing hands often and avoiding people who are sick.

3. Seek medical advice quickly if you develop flu symptoms to see whether you might need medical evaluation or possibly treatment with antiviral medications. People 65 and older are prioritized to get antiviral drugs if they become sick with the flu according to CDC’s guidance. Flu symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people may also have vomiting and diarrhea. People may be infected with the flu, including 2009 H1N1, and have respiratory symptoms without a fever.

## People 65 Years and Older and Seasonal Flu

It has been recognized for many years that older people are at greater risk of serious complications from the flu compared with young, healthy adults. It’s estimated that 90 percent of seasonal flu-related deaths and more than 60 percent of seasonal flu-related hospitalizations in the United States each year occur in people 65 years and older. This is because human immune defenses become weaker with age. So influenza can be a very serious disease for people 65 and older.

## People 65 Years and Older and 2009 H1N1 Flu

The new 2009 H1N1 virus does not seem to be affecting people 65 years and older in the same way that seasonal flu usually does. Most people who have gotten sick from this new virus have been younger. In fact, people 65 and older are the group that is least likely to get infected with this new virus. There have been relatively few infections and even fewer cases of serious illness and death with this new virus in people older than 65. Laboratory tests on blood samples indicate that older people likely have some pre-existing immunity to the 2009 H1N1 flu virus. But while people 65 and older are the least likely to be infected with 2009 H1N1

flu, those that do become infected are at greater risk of having serious complications from their illness.

## Flu Vaccination

### Seasonal Flu Vaccine

People 65 and older are recommended to get seasonal flu vaccine this year, as always.

### 2009 H1N1 Flu Vaccine

People 65 and older are not in a target group recommended to get the earliest doses of 2009 H1N1 vaccine. This is because people age 65 and older are least likely to get sick with the 2009 H1N1 virus. Because there will be limited amounts of vaccine available at first, the first doses are recommended for those who are most likely to get infected.

The U.S. government has purchased 250 million doses of 2009 H1N1 vaccine, so anyone who wants to get the vaccine will have the opportunity to do so. While people 65 and older are not included in the groups recommended to get the earliest doses of vaccine, they can get the 2009 H1N1 influenza vaccine as soon as the high risk and younger groups have had the opportunity to be vaccinated.

## People Age 65 Years and Older and Antiviral Drugs

Influenza antiviral drugs are prescription drugs (pills, liquid, or inhaled powder) that decrease the ability of flu viruses to reproduce. While getting a flu vaccine each year is the first and most important step in protecting against flu, antiviral drugs are a second line of defense in the treatment of flu.

It's very important that antiviral drugs be used early to treat flu illness in people 65 and older who are very sick (for example people who are in the hospital) and people who are sick with flu and who also have a greater chance of getting serious flu complications (see <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/highrisk.htm>).

Although they are the least likely group to be infected with 2009 H1N1 flu, people age 65 and older are at higher risk for influenza related complications. Therefore, they are prioritized for antiviral treatment if they get sick with either seasonal or 2009 H1N1 flu this season.