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Protect yourself from pneumonia caused by flu

Although the flu is a mild illness for most, some people especially those with chronic health conditions may develop pneumonia. Many of those who have been critically ill with the H1N1 (swine) flu have also developed pneumonia, a potentially life-threatening illness.

There are vaccines available to prevent some forms of influenza and pneumonia. “The pneumonia vaccine will not keep you from getting the flu. But it is a proactive measure to protect against the serious and sometimes deadly complications resulting from any respiratory flu,” said William Heymann, M.D., F.A.C.E.P., medical director for the Sarasota County Health Department.

Although people 65 years of age and older should get a pneumonia shot, those age two through 64 years of age are also at high risk for complications from pneumonia brought on by flu. People who should consider getting a pneumonia vaccine include:

- All adults 65 years of age and older;
- Any adult 19 – 64 years of age who smokes, has asthma or some other chronic respiratory complication;
- Anyone 2 – 64 years of age who has a disease or condition that lowers the body’s resistance to infection, such as Hodgkin’s disease; lymphoma or leukemia; kidney failure; multiple myeloma, nephritic syndrome; HIV or AIDS, damaged spleen; or organ transplant;
- Anyone 2 – 64 years of age who is taking a drug treatment that lowers the body’s resistance to infection, such as: long-term steroids, certain cancer drugs, or radiation therapy;
- For children 2 – 18 years of age, parents should consult the child’s healthcare provider to determine if the pneumonia vaccine is right for their child. Also, pneumonia vaccine in children requires a doctor’s prescription.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), if you have had a pneumonia shot before the age of 65, you will only need **one** additional pneumonia shot after the age of 65 for lifetime immunity. Health officials say that there should be a minimum of five years between the two shots.

The cost of the adult pneumonia vaccine at the Sarasota County Health Department is \$52. Cash, check and credit cards are accepted. If you have Medicare Part B as your primary insurance, the health department will bill Medicare; however, other forms of insurance will not be billed. There is no charge for children to receive the vaccine through the federally-funded Vaccines for Children Program. A prescription is not required for children who meet the high risk criteria.

Now is the time to start thinking about protecting you and your family from all types of influenza and pneumonia. Contact your healthcare provider or the Sarasota County Health Department for more information 941-861-2900. You can also visit www.sarasotahealth.org or call the Sarasota County Health Department’s Flu Information Line, 941-861-2800.

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