

Vaccines for Alphas

Alphas are at greater risk for [infections](#) of the nose, windpipe, and lungs (*respiratory infections*) and infection-related liver damage. Vaccines can greatly reduce your risk.

Flu vaccine

The influenza virus causes influenza or “the flu.” It spreads from person to person when they breathe infected droplets in the air.

Similar to other respiratory viruses like COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2), the flu can cause severe illness. About 36,000 people in the U.S. die from the flu every year. More than 100,00 end up in the hospital as a result of the flu.

Flu symptoms include:

- Fever
- Headache
- Feeling tired
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Sore muscles

Note: Children may have nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. Adults rarely have those symptoms.

Having the flu can lead to pneumonia and dehydration. It can also worsen chronic medical conditions like heart failure, asthma, or diabetes. This is especially true if you’re over 65 or have chronic health conditions.

Who needs a flu vaccine?

Anyone with a higher risk of serious complications, including people who:

- Are 50 years old or older
- Have chronic heart or lung disease
- Have weak immune systems

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- Live in nursing homes
- Work in the healthcare field
- Live with high-risk individuals

The problem with FluMist®

FluMist is a new form of flu vaccine. You don't get it as a shot. Instead, you take it as a spray, right into each of your nostrils. But that's not the most important difference between FluMist and the standard flu shot.

Standard flu shots are made from **dead virus**. FluMist is made from a weaker form of **live virus**. Because of this, Alphas with lung disease and their families shouldn't get the FluMist vaccine. They should also avoid being around other people who have had FluMist for about two weeks.

Note: FluMist is not recommended for people who are allergic to eggs or egg products.

Pneumonia Vaccine (Pneumovax-23 & Prevnar-13)

Pneumococcal pneumonia is caused by a bacteria called *Streptococcus pneumoniae*. The infection begins with a high fever, cough, and stabbing chest pains. It's one of the most common causes of death in the United States, killing 7,000-13,000 people each year.

Who needs a pneumonia vaccine?

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends pneumonia vaccines for people aged 2-64 with

- Chronic cardiovascular disease, including congestive heart failure
- Chronic obstructive [lung disease](#), like emphysema
- Diabetes

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People over the age of 65 (and their caregivers), should get a dose of Pneumovax. Dosing should start five years from the last dose before you turn 65. For example, if you turn 65 and had your dose of Pneumovax when you were 63, you'll get your next dose at 68.

Individuals over the age of 65 also should also get Prevnar-13, the newest pneumococcal vaccination. This vaccine is more effective than Pneumovax. Prevnar-13 and Pneumovax-23 should be given separately and on a staggered schedule, per the guidelines.

Hepatitis vaccines

Hepatitis is a word used to describe inflammation of the liver. This may be due to Alpha-1 or to viruses. Hepatitis can lead to tenderness and scarring. The most common types of viral hepatitis are hepatitis A, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C.

You can get hepatitis A from contaminated food or water, or if you come in contact with feces. Hepatitis B and C are transmitted through infected blood and bodily fluids.

Hepatitis B and C may become chronic conditions and lead to serious, permanent liver damage and death. Because Alpha-1 may increase the liver disease caused by these infections, all Alphas should get the hepatitis B vaccine series. And every Alpha should be tested for hepatitis C since we have a cure for it.

Learn more

For more in-depth information on this topic, please visit the [Big Fat Reference Guide \(BFRG\)](#). If you are enrolled in AlphaNet's Subscriber Portal, you can access the BFRG [here](#).