

VA, Walgreens Partner to Offer Vets No-Cost Flu Vaccines

Flu immunization prevents and significantly lessens the illness

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Influenza is a potentially serious disease that causes thousands of flu-related deaths each year. It results in hospitalization for hundreds of thousands of people, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

Based on CDC studies from 2010 through 2018, influenza-related deaths ranged from around 12,000 to 79,000 annually, while people hospitalized from the flu varied from roughly 140,000 to 960,000 each year.

The influenza vaccine provides the best protection against the seasonal flu, said Alex Novielli, PharmD, immunizations manager for Walgreens, an organization with a strong focus on improving health for veterans.

“For years, Walgreens has partnered with the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) to provide veterans with no-cost flu vaccines at all Walgreens pharmacies and Duane Reade pharmacies to help ensure medical records are complete by securely sharing veteran immunization records,” Novielli said.

The CDC recommends that everyone 6 months of age and older receive an annual influenza vaccine, Novielli added. The best time to receive a flu immunization is before the end of October, he said, although “it’s never too early to get your annual flu vaccine once the new vaccine becomes available.”

Veterans interested in receiving a no-cost flu shot should visit a Walgreens or Duane Reade pharmacy, Novielli said.

The annual flu vaccine is developed based on recommendations from the World Health Organization and CDC, based on strains they expect to be most prominent in the upcoming flu season, he added.

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According to the CDC, the flu vaccination reduces the risk of illness by between 40 percent to 60 percent among the general population. Influenza immunization also has been shown to reduce the severity of illness in people who have received the vaccine but still get sick.

Recent studies showed that flu vaccinations prevented an estimated 85,000 flu-related hospitalizations during the 2016 season while reducing children's risk of flu-related pediatric intensive care unit admissions by 74 percent during seasons 2010 through 2012.

Flu shots decrease a pregnant woman's risk of being hospitalized with influenza by an average of 40 percent, according to a 2018 study.

Getting vaccinated also protects the people around you, reported the CDC, including those who are more vulnerable to serious flu illness such as babies and young children, older people and individuals with chronic health conditions.

In addition to the annual influenza vaccine, the CDC recommends that all children under age 2 and adults older than 65 receive pneumococcal vaccines to help protect against pneumonia, Novielli said.

"Eligible patients should speak with their pharmacist and/or their health care provider to see which pneumococcal vaccine is right for them, as age, state and health restrictions may apply," Novielli said. "The two different pneumococcal vaccines — Prevnar 13 and Pneumovax 23 — remain the same year over year, and neither are required annually."

Both the influenza and pneumonia vaccines are available at numerous locations without an appointment.

This article is featured in the September 2019 issue of [VFW Magazine](#), and was written by Janice Phelan. Janice Phelan is a freelance writer based in Lee's Summit, Mo.