

CENTRAL CONNECTICUT HEALTH DISTRICT

SERVING THE TOWNS OF BERLIN, ROCKY HILL AND WETHERSFIELD

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Do You Need A Pneumonia Shot?

October happens to be Healthy Lung month, and about this time every year, many of us begin to think about getting the annual flu shot. Unlike last year, there should be plenty of vaccine, but most of it will not be available until mid-to-late November. Even though November is an optimal time to be vaccinated for flu, many people, especially those considered to be at high risk for complications from the flu, are used to getting their flu shot earlier. For those who will have to wait a little longer this year to be vaccinated, there are other precautions that can be taken to reduce the risk of becoming seriously ill this winter. One of those precautions for high-risk people is to get a pneumonia shot.

Pneumonia, a serious illness characterized by inflammation of the lungs, affects about 1 out of 100 people each year. Approximately 40,000 Americans die from pneumonia annually, according to the Centers for Disease Control. In addition to affecting the lungs, pneumonia can get into the bloodstream, causing a condition called bacteremia that can lead to other lung problems and heart conditions. Also, it can invade the tissues and fluids surrounding the brain and spinal cord, resulting in meningitis. Although pneumonia may be caused by a virus or a fungus, the most common and most serious form is caused by bacteria. Although antibiotics are used to combat the bacteria, older people and those with weakened immune systems may not respond to treatment.

Fortunately, there is a vaccine that prevents bacterial pneumonia. The U.S. Public Health Service, the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases, the National Institute on Aging, and the American Lung Association all recommend that everyone over the age of 65 get the pneumonia vaccine. Additionally, people with chronic diseases such as cardiovascular or pulmonary disease, diabetes, cirrhosis, some forms of kidney disease, and sickle cell disease should be immunized, as should anyone without a spleen or with a compromised immune system, such as people with AIDS and organ transplant recipients. Members of high-risk ethnic groups, including African Americans, Native Americans, and Alaskan Natives, should get the pneumonia shot as well.

The pneumonia vaccine is both effective and safe. It does not cause pneumonia in those who are vaccinated, and most people only require one dose to be fully protected from the 23 different strains of bacterial pneumonia that are responsible for 90% of all known pneumococcal disease cases. Unlike the flu shot, a pneumonia shot can be administered any time of the year. Healthy individuals age 65 or older normally require one shot, but those who were vaccinated before age 65 should have a second shot once 5 years have elapsed since the first dose. Other people at risk should consult their physician to determine if a pneumonia vaccination is necessary.

Since we are now in flu vaccination season, people are mindful of the colds and flu infections that will accompany the upcoming winter. If you are within one of the high-risk categories for acquiring pneumonia and its complications, this is a good time to find out if you have had a pneumonia shot, and to arrange for one if you need it. Many flu clinics will be offered in the community in the coming months, and a number of them will also offer pneumonia shots. Both the pneumonia and the flu shots can be given

at the same time.

The Central Connecticut Health District, serving the towns of Berlin, Rocky Hill, and Wethersfield, has been providing both flu and pneumonia shots to residents for a number of years, and will do so again this year. To find out about upcoming flu and pneumonia shot clinics, contact the Central Connecticut Health District at 721-2822 (www.ccthd.org) or the Connecticut Lung Association at 1-800-NO-TO-FLU (1-800-668-6458) (www.alact.org). Other helpful resources for general information about pneumonia and its vaccine, include the National Institute on Aging Information Center (1-800-222-2225, www.nia.nih.gov), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 1-(800-232-2522, www.cdc.gov/nip), the American Lung Association (1-800-586-4872, www.lungusa.org/diseases), and the National Library of Medicine (1-888-346-3656, <http://medlineplus.gov>).