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People Over 65 Face Greater Flu Risks

Right now, we are in the middle of a very severe flu outbreak. As of February 17, 2025, Kansas is one of the few states with the highest influenza outbreaks. The flu can be potentially serious to anyone, but if you are over age 65, you need to take extra precautions. Older adults account for 70 to 85 percent of flu-related hospitalizations and deaths, greatly outnumbering younger people.

Flu complications among older people result from age-related declines in the immune system. As we age, the body must work harder to fight infections. Older people with chronic health conditions also make them more susceptible. The flu season usually peaks from November to February but can continue into April.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that people over 65 get their flu shot yearly. If possible, they suggest getting a higher dose. A flu vaccination can significantly reduce the risk of developing a severe illness and lessen the risk of complications. It is also recommended that you get a pneumonia shot if you are over 50. One of the complications of the flu in older adults is pneumonia. One of the best defenses against the flu is not to get it. The flu virus can live on hard surfaces for up to 48 hours. Make sure you are washing your hands regularly. Using soap and water is the best way to keep your hands clean, and it works better than hand sanitizers. Make sure to lather up for at least 20 seconds to kill germs. The flu virus can also live on frequently touched items such as faucets, light switches, T.V. remote controls, cell phones, keyboards, microwave pads, and gaming consoles. Wipe these surfaces regularly with disinfecting wipes.

If you are over 65, contact your healthcare provider if you develop flu symptoms. Do not wait to see if you feel better in the morning. Antiviral drugs can reduce the severity of your symptoms; the longer you wait, the less effective the medication will be. Flu symptoms generally come on quickly, including fever, cough, chills, sore throat, muscle aches, headache, and fatigue. Older adults may also experience trouble breathing, dehydration, dizziness, or confusion. Also, remember not everyone will have a fever, but if you are over age 65 and your fever is 100° F or higher, seek medical care.

With the flu season at its peak, remember to be proactive in preventing the flu. Wash your hands often, sanitize surfaces, and get your recommended vaccinations. For more information about the flu, visit the CDC website at <https://www.cdc.gov/flu>.