KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY | Extension
Meadowlark District

October 16, 2026

Teresa Hatfield
District Extension Agent, Family and Community Wellness

Flu Shots Remain One of the Best Defenses for Older Adults

It's that time of year, the leaves are falling, the temperatures this week at least (it's Kansas after all) are cool and crisp. I'm enjoying the cooler weather and the chance to break out a couple of light sweaters. It's also time to think about getting your flu shot. I may be preaching to the choir, but I'm surprised how many folks I talk to that haven't gotten it yet.

No one is immune to the flu, and those older than 65 face greater risk of serious complications, including hospitalization, and death. It's nothing to mess around with. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), between 70% and 85% seasonal flu related deaths and 50% to 70% of flu-related hospitalization occur among people age 65 and older. This is because as we age our immune systems do as well, and they don't quite work as well as they used to. This makes us more vulnerable to illnesses such as influenza. The vaccination helps to support our immune system and reduce the risk of developing serious illnesses like the flu.

While there is still controversy around vaccinations, the flu has been proved safe for many years. The CDC recommends that everyone ages 6 months and older receive an annual flu vaccine, with special emphasis on adults age 65 and older. For this age group, CDC preferentially recommends higher-dose or enhanced flu vaccines, including high-dose, recombinant, or adjuvanted flu vaccines, because they may provide better protection than standard-dose vaccines.

Some people mistakenly believe that the flu is simply a bad cold. In reality, influenza can lead to severe illness, loss of independence, and lengthy hospital stays for older adults. Even healthy older adults can develop serious complications. Vaccination not only helps protect the individual receiving the shot but also helps reduce the spread of influenza to family members, friends, and community members.

The good news is that Medicare makes it easy and affordable for older adults to get vaccinated. Medicare Part B covers one flu shot each flu season at no cost when administered by a provider or pharmacy that accepts Medicare assignment. Beneficiaries pay no deductible, copayment, or coinsurance for the vaccine.

Health officials generally recommend getting vaccinated in September or October, before flu activity begins to increase. However, it is still beneficial to receive a flu shot later in the season if you have not yet been vaccinated.

For older adults, an annual flu shot is one of the simplest and most effective steps they can take to protect their health, maintain their independence, and enjoy a safer, healthier flu season.