



Racial Disparities in Flu Immunization

Influenza vaccination (the flu shot) is the best way to prevent influenza and its severe complications. African-Americans have lower influenza and pneumococcal immunization rates compared to the rest of the population.

Impact of Influenza (“the flu”)

- The flu is highly contagious and a serious respiratory illness;
- The typical winter flu season affects 7 percent to 20 percent of the U.S. population; results in 114,000 hospitalizations and 36,000 deaths. The majority of deaths occur in people over age 65.

Flu Shots

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends annual flu shots for:

- Persons at increased risk of complications from the flu such as those age **50 and older**;
- Adults and children with chronic diseases **including** diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease, lung disease, compromised immune systems;
- Flu shots are encouraged for young children aged 6 months to 23 months;
- Individuals age 50-65;
- Close contacts of those at high risk of flu complications including family members and medical professionals.

Racial Disparities in Adult Influenza Immunization

According to the 2001 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey (BRFSS):

- Sixty-seven percent of whites received flu shots in the past year compared to 48 percent of blacks and 55 percent of Hispanics.

Common Barriers to Adult Immunization

- Myths and misconceptions, such as “Flu shots cause the flu”;
- Doubts about the safety and effectiveness of flu shots;
- Lack awareness of the need of immunization;
- Cost
- Lack of regular visits to the physician’s office

What CDC is doing to Overcome These Barriers

- Working with organizations such as the National Medical Association, Congress of National Black Churches, to increase awareness of the importance of annual flu shots;
- Developing information and educational efforts that target minority populations and health care providers;
- Programs designed to reduce disparities such as Racial and Ethnic Adult Disparities in Immunization (READII) and the 2003-04 Influenza Immunization Campaign.

Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Flu Shots (But Forgot to Ask...)

- Getting a flu shot every year is the best protection against influenza;
- Flu shots cannot give you the flu;
- People aged 65 and older are at increased risk of flu-related complications and should make getting a flu shot a priority;
- Your flu shot not only protects you – it helps protect your whole family;
- The best time to get a flu shot is in October or November, but flu shots in December, January or February can still offer considerable protection from the flu.

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