

# After a Bout With the Flu, Seniors May Be at Risk for Severe Illnesses

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Many people know that compared with young healthy adults, individuals age 65 and older are more likely to suffer from serious flu complications. But folks in this age group are also at an increased risk for heart disease, stroke and disability, reports [Vanderbilt University's Medical Center](#).

According to William Schaffner, MD, a professor of medicine and infectious disease at Vanderbilt University's School of Medicine in Nashville, in the two weeks to a month after recovery from influenza, seniors have a three to five times increased risk of having a heart attack and a two to three times increased risk of having a stroke.

Schaffner suggested that the most effective way to prevent these flu-related health problems is to encourage older adults to get vaccinated. "We have a couple of vaccines now that are particularly designed and licensed for use in older adults and that is because they produce an enhanced immune response in this population," he said.

The high-dose influenza vaccine is four times as effective in older adults than the regular flu shot. The second flu vaccine, which became available last flu season, contains an adjuvant, a substance added to a vaccine that helps create a stronger immune response.

Usually it takes several days to a couple of weeks to recover from the bug. Even after recuperating from the flu "[seniors] may never get back to that same level of function that they had before," Schaffner added. This is because the infectious disease can trigger a domino effect that leads to disability and a decrease in individuals' quality of life.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that those 6 months or older receive a seasonal flu vaccine every year and emphasize that the shot is especially important for those 65 and older. (Note: The agency stresses that people 65 and older should avoid the intradermal flu shot and the jet injector flu vaccine.)

[Click here](#) to learn how infants with an older sibling are at a higher risk of hospitalization for the flu.

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