

It's National Influenza Vaccination Week: Get the vaccine, especially if you have asthma

By ACSH Staff — December 9, 2013



This week, the U.S. Department of Health and Human

Services, the CDC, state and local health departments and other health agencies [are observing](#) ^[1] National Influenza Vaccination Week. This includes various educational activities throughout the country to promote the importance of the influenza vaccination, which is recommended for all persons six months of age and older by the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices. At this point, about 126 million doses of the vaccine have been distributed throughout the United States.

And the influenza vaccination is [especially important](#) ^[2] for those with underlying health conditions, such as asthma, because influenza can exacerbate symptoms of asthma, leading to complications such as pneumonia or even death. In order to analyze national vaccination coverage among those persons two years or older with asthma, the CDC used data from the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS), conducted between 2010 and 2011, consisting of about 32,600 responses. Researchers found that vaccination rates increased from about 37 percent to about 50 percent over a period of five years ending in 2011. However, those numbers are well below the goals set by Healthy People 2020 80 percent for those six months to 17 years and 90 percent for those 18 and older.

Other findings included that the highest rate of vaccination among persons with asthma was in those ages 50-64 years and those 65 and older. More than twice as many people with health insurance were vaccinated, as compared to those with no health insurance. And as health care visits increased over a period of a year, so did vaccination coverage. Overall (including those without asthma), vaccination coverage was lower among non-Hispanic blacks and Hispanics compared to non-Hispanic whites.

Although there were limitations with these data asthma status was self-reported, small sample size of those with asthma, and potential that results may not be generalizable to entire population ACIP has made recommendations based on the results. They are recommending a series of interventions in order to increase vaccination rates including reducing out-of-pocket costs for

patients, a patient reminder system with alerts about getting vaccinated, and a provider reminder system which would include alerts for providers to remind asthma sufferers to get vaccinated. Furthermore, they are advocating that asthma education for healthcare providers includes a recommendation for influenza vaccination for patients with asthma.

ACSH's Dr. Gilbert Ross had this comment: Is it possible that healthcare providers need to be educated or even reminded to get their asthmatic patients vaccinated against the flu? That's possibly the highest-risk group for lung complications and severe outcomes. I hope they don't need to be reminded to advise their patients to quit smoking, too.

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Links

[1] <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6248a5.htm>

[2] <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6248a1.htm>