

## A Few Shots Might Help (or Probably Couldn't Hurt)

As we feel the weather turn cooler we turn up the heat, and bring out those added layers. We know we need a bit more protection from the elements. As we age we also need more protection from the unseen infectious agents sharing our world. Our immune system naturally weakens with age and the cold weather impacts it further. And sadly for us, the cold weather toughens the shell of viruses and makes them more easily shared. *We know the best way to reduce the risk of infection is to wash our hands frequently.* But the viruses and bacteria are everywhere and we are defended best by our own immune system. That means adequate rest, fitness, a balanced diet and stress management. It also means priming our immune system with vaccinations.

Your primary care physician should monitor your vaccination status and is always the best reference about what you should receive and when. But by way of a primer, I've listed below the CDC recommendations for people over 65:

- **Influenza (Flu)** – every year. A High dose injection is indicated for people >65  
*(Lathrop's flu clinic is scheduled for October 12 at both campuses).*
- **Pneumonia** - there are two separate vaccinations recommended to provide protection from a wide range of bacterial agents, a single dose of each is all that is recommended.
  - Prevnar13 is generally given first
  - Pneumovax23 is then usually given a year after

Both of these vaccines above are covered by Medicare B.

- **Tetanus/diphtheria (Td)** booster every 10 years
- **Chickenpox** (Varicella) recommended, Hepatitis A&B possibly if you didn't get these as a child
- **Shingles**- This is a form of the varicella herpes zoster virus, left dormant after one has contracted chickenpox. (Over 99% of people over 40 have had chickenpox.) The appearance of symptoms is linked to periods of decreased immunity. The majority of cases appear in people over 60, and those with immunosuppression are at particular risk. You probably know someone who has developed this painful condition. Symptoms are usually worse in older people. The CDC recommends the shingles vaccine even in those who have previously had shingles. The vaccine has an effective range of only 5yrs and is less effective for older people. Effectiveness for those 60-69 is 64%, but for those over 70 that drops to 38%. The general sense is that even while the vaccine may not fully protect someone from developing symptoms, those symptoms may be lessened after receiving it. *The shingles vaccine is covered by Medicare part D and Medicare advantage plans.*