



## TRI-VALLEY Help-line

October 2013

Tri-Valley receives many questions from area seniors, younger people with disabilities and caregivers and has created this monthly Help-line column to provide some assistance. We are also available five days a week to answer individual questions in person or on the phone. Our website is [www.trivalleyinc.org](http://www.trivalleyinc.org).

### Questions for the Flu Season

**Q: Is it safe for seniors to get a flu shot?**

**A:** Yes. People age 65 and over account for 9 out of 10 flu-related deaths. As many as 49,000 people die from the flu each year in America. Seniors are more vulnerable to influenza (flu). A flu shot is safe and effective, and is the best way to avoid the flu, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. A flu shot also protects your family and friends - because you can't spread the flu to them.

One common myth is that you can get the flu from a flu shot, but the vaccine does not contain the live virus - so it's impossible to get the flu from the shot.

Even if you consider yourself healthy - anyone can catch the flu. It is easily transmitted through coughing and sneezing or contact with fluids from an infected person's mouth or nose. As we get older, our immune system weakens, so seniors are more vulnerable to the flu.

If you're aged 65 or older, you have two options for an annual flu shot:

- The traditional flu shot. Some studies have shown that the traditional flu vaccine might not work as well for people age 65+.
- A higher dose flu shot designed specifically for people aged 65 and older. This higher dose vaccine addresses the age-related decline of the immune system to trigger a stronger immune response following influenza immunization.

The higher dose vaccine more often may cause side effects, but they are usually mild and temporary and include pain, redness, and swelling at the injection site, as well as headache, muscle aches, fever, and malaise. But most people have minimal or no side effects after

receiving the higher dose vaccine. Ask your health care provider which shot makes more sense for you. Either way, Medicare Part B will pay for both the traditional or the higher dose vaccine, with no co-pay required.

In addition to the flu shot, seniors should take other precautions, like covering coughs, washing hands, and staying away from people who are sick.

The flu vaccine should become available by the early fall. But if you are unable to get a shot early in the season, it is still recommended that you get vaccinated throughout the flu season into the winter months. If you got a flu shot last year, you still need to get a new shot this year, because the types of flu viruses change every year and a new vaccine is produced every year to protect against the latest flu strains. The immunity to flu viruses weakens after a year, so an annual shot is needed.

You can get a flu shot at many places besides a doctor's office. The vaccines are available at retail stores, drug stores, and flu clinics where you work. Use the place that is most convenient for you.

There are some people who should NOT get a flu shot: if you have ever had a severe allergic reaction to eggs, a serious reaction to a previous flu shot, or Guillain-Barré syndrome.

For more information about the flu season this year, go to [www.cdc.gov/Flu](http://www.cdc.gov/Flu) for more information.

***Is it OK to get a flu shot at a retail store or clinic instead of at my physician's office?***

Yes. Influenza vaccines are now widely available at retail stores, pharmacies, workplace flu clinics, and many more places. You should get vaccinated at a place that is most convenient for you.

***Can I get influenza from the flu shot?***

No. The flu shot does not contain the live virus so it is impossible to get influenza from the vaccine.

***Does Medicare cover the cost of the higher dose option?***

Yes. Both vaccine options are covered by Medicare Part B with no copay.

Talk to your health care provider today about the dangers of the flu, the benefits of vaccination and the best vaccine option to meet the needs of your age group.

- See more at: <http://www.ncoa.org/improve-health/community-education/flu--you/frequently-asked-questions.html#sthash.MtQEiruF.dpuf>

Tri-Valley continues to be ready to assist you with other questions through its free Information & Resource (I&R) HELP-LINE at (508) 949-6640 or 1-800-286-6640. You may also access Tri-Valley by E-mail: [info@tves.org](mailto:info@tves.org) or visit the agency's website at: [www.trivalleyinc.org](http://www.trivalleyinc.org) To connect with services for elders and their families anywhere in Massachusetts call 1-800-AGE-INFO.

Tri-Valley, Inc. is a private non-profit agency providing in-home and community based services in 25 Southern Worcester County towns. The agency receives funding from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts through the Executive Office of Elder Affairs and Federal financial support under the Older Americans Act furnished by the Central Massachusetts Agency on Aging and the Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs. Funds are also received from other public and private sources. All donations are welcome and memorials may be established. Marilyn L. Travinski is the Executive Director.

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