



Adult Vaccination in Communities of Color

Thursday, January 28, 2021



Each year, thousands of adults suffer from serious infectious diseases that in severe cases can result in hospitalization or even death. Even though there are vaccines available to help prevent a number of these potentially serious diseases, vaccination rates among U.S. adults remain low—lagging well behind federal goals and expert recommendations. Older African Americans and Hispanics are less likely than white adults to be vaccinated, leaving them at greater risk.

And, with chronic diseases like diabetes diagnosed at rates 77% higher among African Americans and 66% higher among Hispanics when compared to non-Hispanic whites, this leaves these individuals at greater risk for certain vaccine-preventable infectious diseases like pneumococcal pneumonia, the most common form of bacterial pneumonia.

Still, research shows that Hispanics and African Americans are less likely to report receiving preventive health services in the ways experts recommend. In fact, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that in 2015, only 50% of African Americans and 41% of Hispanics age 65 or older were vaccinated against pneumococcal disease compared to 68% for white adults of the same age.

Why aren't more adult African-Americans and Hispanics getting vaccinated?

The answer is certainly not one-size-fits-all, but factors include limited access to preventive healthcare services, fear and mistrust of the medical community and language barriers. Certain socioeconomic characteristics play a role, too. Research shows that the risk of contracting potentially serious infectious diseases, like pneumococcal pneumonia, is dramatically increased in higher-poverty regions and communities. Candid conversations with healthcare providers can help clear up confusion or concerns about vaccines and other preventative health services.

What does all this mean for me?

It's important that you speak with your healthcare provider about which preventive health services, including screenings and immunizations, are recommended for you. As we age, our immune systems weaken, increasing our risk for pneumococcal pneumonia, the flu, shingles, among other infectious diseases. The good news is that there are vaccines available that may help minimize your risk for certain serious infectious diseases.

Worried about the cost of preventive care? Here's what you can do:

Find out what vaccines you need. The CDC provides recommendations based on both age group and risk factors. Be sure to speak with your healthcare provider as he or she will take important factors into account (e.g., your past medical history, risk factors, and current health). If you have insurance, ask if the vaccines you need are covered. Several insurance providers, including Medicare and Medicare Part B, cover medically necessary and preventive health services, including regular "Wellness" visits and CDC-recommended vaccines without a copay. In addition, accessing vaccines today is easier than ever. Local county health departments, pharmacies and community-based clinics in everyday places, such as shopping malls, grocery stores and senior centers now offer vaccines—many on a "walk in" basis. To find out if you qualify for Medicare or Medicaid, visit Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services for eligibility information. If you do not currently have health insurance, visit www.HealthCare.gov to see if you qualify for

different types of health coverage.

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References

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Originally published, Thursday, January 28, 2021