Roll Up Your Sleeve for Good Health

By: Bonnie Hinds

At a Glance

It is common knowledge that many elderly people suffer with fragile health. Doctor visits and prescription drugs are often a routine part of their lives. What is, perhaps, less obvious is that even the most robust seniors may be only one illness away from debilitating health issues. The flu, for instance, a bothersome but relatively minor concern for younger adults, can prove deadly for seniors. Encouraging older adults to seek inoculations for vaccine-preventable diseases is imperative to good health.

Time Required

35 minutes

Core Message(s)

Preventive vaccines represent the single greatest advance in the history of human health. Most Americans recognize the need for vaccinations for infants and young children but are less familiar with the nature of inoculations for older citizens. Because seniors are likely to experience diminished immunity to disease, and because they frequently suffer from chronic conditions later in life, their resistance to disease and their ability to recover from illness makes them especially vulnerable to serious—and fatal—health outcomes.

Four preventive vaccines are routinely recommended for seniors:

- seasonal influenza,
- pneumonia,
- tetanus/diphtheria [pertussis], and
- shingles

Outcomes

The successful learner will be able to:

- Identify the four preventive vaccines recommended for older adults (seasonal influenza, pneumonia, tetanus/diphtheria [pertussis], and shingles.
- Understand the questions he/she should review with his/her physician in considering vaccination.
- Will be motivated to discuss vaccination with their physician.

Materials Needed

- PowerPoint Lesson Plan (with copies for each learner)
- Handout: Vaccination Recommendations for Older Adults (if possible, laminated)

Getting Ready

Laptop and projector should be preset with PowerPoint Presentation. Copies of the PowerPoint Lesson Plan and vaccination handout should be duplicated for each learner. Instructor should remember to use greater-than-usual vocal volume in working with senior citizens.
FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Generally considered a minor illness, the flu kills approximately 36,000 Americans each year, the greatest number, seniors. Approximately 50,000 Americans succumb to fatal pneumonia each year, a majority, seniors. Moreover, both illnesses can lead to chronic health conditions among older citizens.

Diphtheria at any age is a very serious and frightening disease. While it has been well controlled through preventive vaccinations, its highly communicable nature remains very troubling and highlights the need for continued commitment to vaccination for all ages.

Tetanus can affect individuals of any age. A bacteriological disease of the nervous system, it results in lockjaw and difficulty swallowing. Up to 20 percent of cases are fatal, with the elderly suffering the highest mortality. Presuming seniors received their first Td vaccine as a child, boosters are required only once every ten years.

Pertussis (or whooping cough) vaccine is essential for those older adults who maintain close contact with infants. A one-time addition of pertussis serum to the Td (tetanus/diphtheria) vaccine will offer the necessary protection.

Shingles strike nearly one million Americans each year, at least half of whom are over the age of sixty. The after-effects of shingles, particularly among older populations, can malinger for weeks, months, or even years. A single dose, administered via injection, can prevent months of misery.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Welcome (5 min)
Instructor will begin the session with the icebreaker/get acquainted exercise of his or her choice.

Anchor (5 min)
Query participants as to how many wear their seat belt in the car – and why. The dire consequences of a potential accident render the effort to buckle up supremely worthwhile. Secondly, ask them to consider the discomfort and anxiety of relying on a ventilator to breathe, a very real possibility for severe pneumonia. Vaccinations are the “buckle up” for disease prevention.

TEACHING THE LESSON (25 min)
Instructional material is found in the PowerPoint presentation.

Away
Encourage participants to discuss vaccinations with their personal physician.