

### **New Call to Action Issued on the Dangers of Influenza Among Adults with Chronic Health Conditions**

- *Medical experts call for improved annual influenza (flu) vaccination rates to protect adults from infection that can lead to serious health complications*
- *The prevalence of many chronic health conditions increases with age and will likely rise as the US population ages*
- *New survey shows consumers with chronic health conditions are vastly unaware of flu complications*

**Bethesda, MD (November 28, 2018)** – The National Foundation for Infectious Diseases (NFID) issued an urgent Call to Action about the dangers of influenza (flu) infection among adults with chronic health conditions including heart disease, lung disease, and diabetes, and stressed the need for improved adult flu vaccination rates. Additionally, a new national survey conducted by NFID found that most US adults are not aware that individuals with chronic health conditions face a higher risk of flu-related complications, including an increased risk of heart attack or stroke.

“Flu can result in serious complications for individuals living with chronic health conditions, even when these conditions are well-controlled,” said NFID Medical Director William Schaffner, MD. “It is imperative that healthcare professionals inform patients with chronic health conditions of their increased risk and insist on annual flu vaccination to help protect them from complications including hospitalization, catastrophic disability, and even death.”

Estimates indicate that 31 percent of US adults age 50-64 years and 47 percent of those age 65 years and older are at high risk for flu-related complications due to certain chronic health conditions. The prevalence of many chronic health conditions increases with age and will likely rise as the US population ages.

During the 2017-2018 US flu season, nearly 80,000 people died and more than 950,000 people were hospitalized due to flu and flu-related complications. Beyond those devastating numbers, flu infection puts individuals with chronic health conditions at increased risk for serious long-term complications. Those at risk include people with diabetes, heart disease, and lung disease such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

Among those hospitalized for flu during the 2017-2018 flu season, 92 percent had at least one reported underlying medical condition that placed them at high risk for flu-related complications, the most frequent of which included:

- Cardiovascular disease (46 percent)
- Metabolic disorders such as diabetes (43 percent)
- Obesity (37 percent)
- Chronic lung disease (30 percent)

The NFID [Call to Action](#) was developed from a Roundtable meeting held in Washington, DC in July 2018. This meeting convened leading medical experts and representatives from nearly 20 national healthcare

--more--

organizations that support the need for improved adult flu vaccination rates in the US. The Call to Action provides recommended strategies to improve outcomes for vulnerable populations. Additional complementary resources for healthcare professionals and patients can be found at [www.nfid.org/flu-chronic-health-conditions](http://www.nfid.org/flu-chronic-health-conditions), including a webinar, infographics, fact sheets, and a CME journal article.

The Call to Action states a direct connection between flu and exacerbation of chronic health conditions.

“The impact of flu-induced inflammation is underappreciated among healthcare professionals and patients,” said Allen J. Taylor, MD, Chair of Cardiology, MedStar Heart and Vascular Institute, who attended the NFID Roundtable on behalf of the American College of Cardiology. “Many individuals with heart disease are unaware that their risk of a heart attack increases by up to 10 times in the days and weeks after an acute flu infection, and that the flu shot reduces heart attack risk.”

### **New Survey Also Shows Consumers Vastly Unaware of Flu Complications**

NFID recently conducted a consumer survey to better understand public awareness of the connection between chronic health conditions and serious complications of flu that revealed:

- Less than a quarter of US adults understand that people with heart disease (24 percent) and diabetes (22 percent) are at greater risk for flu-related complications, and awareness is significantly less for people of color than white respondents.
- Less than 20 percent of US adults are aware that heart attack (16 percent), worsening of diabetes (16 percent), stroke (13 percent), and disability (10 percent) can result in potential complications of flu.

“In the US, more than 30 million adults are currently living with diabetes, which puts them at a six times greater risk of flu-related hospitalization,” said Melissa D. Young, PharmD, CDE, BC-ADM, Department of Veterans Affairs, who represented the American Association of Diabetes Educators at the NFID Roundtable. “Yet the data shows that people simply are not aware. It’s our job to educate patients and insist on annual flu vaccination as part of routine management of their condition.”

Sanofi Pasteur, the vaccines division of Sanofi, provided funding and other support for this activity. [NFID policies](#) restrict funders from controlling program content.

### **Supporting Organizations**

The following organizations support the goals of the Call to Action to increase awareness of the dangers of flu infection among adults with chronic health conditions and the benefits of annual vaccination, and to ultimately improve public health and patient outcomes.

Alliance for Aging Research  
American Academy of Family Physicians  
American Association of Diabetes Educators  
American College of Cardiology  
American College of Emergency Physicians  
American College of Physicians  
American Lung Association  
American Medical Group Association  
American Nurses Association  
American Osteopathic Association  
American Pharmacists Association  
Caregiver Action Network  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
Immunization Action Coalition  
National Adult and Influenza Immunization Summit  
National Association of Chain Drug Stores  
National Foundation for Infectious Diseases  
The Gerontological Society of America

--more--

**About NFID**

Founded in 1973, NFID is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to educating the public and healthcare professionals about the burden, causes, prevention, and treatment of infectious diseases across the lifespan. Visit [www.nfid.org](http://www.nfid.org) for more information.

###