

Infectious diseases cause significant emergency visits, hospitalizations for older adults

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In a first-of-its-kind study published in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, researchers calculated that infectious diseases account for 13.5 percent of emergency room (ER) visits involving older adults—a higher percentage than ER visits for heart attacks and congestive heart failure combined. Infectious diseases are those that can be passed from person-to-person and caused by viruses, bacteria, or parasites.

In their study, researchers examined claims data involving some 134 million ER visits and focused on those made by adults aged 65 and older. Here's what they learned:

- Lower [respiratory tract infections](#), such as pneumonia, account for 26 percent of all ER visits for [infectious diseases](#). They also accounted for 15 percent of the infectious disease-related deaths during ER visits and hospitalizations.
- Pneumonia alone accounts for 17.5 percent of ER visits.
- Septicemia, a serious blood infection, accounted for 32 percent of infectious disease-related hospitalizations and 75 percent of infectious disease-related deaths during ER visits and hospitalizations.
- People age 85 and older have the highest rate of ER visits for infectious diseases.

The data the researchers examined included more than 3 million ER visits related to infectious diseases. The researchers reported that 57 percent of those visits resulted in hospitalizations; for people aged 85 and older, the rate of hospitalizations was even higher at 66.5 percent.

While infectious disease-related issues are serious, the [researchers](#) remain cautiously optimistic that some infectious disease-related ER visits and hospitalizations can be prevented. For example, they noted that roughly 40 percent of [older adults](#) do not receive the pneumococcal vaccine, which helps prevent pneumonia, and about one-third of older adults do not receive the influenza vaccine, another tool that can help prevent unnecessary health risks associated with the flu.

More information: "Infectious Disease-related Emergency Department Visits Among the Elderly in the United States, 2011-2012." [onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10... 1/jgs.13836/abstract](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jgs.13836/abstract)

Provided by American Geriatrics Society

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