

# Flu shot crucial for those with COPD

January 7 2019, by Steven Reinberg, Healthday Reporter

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(HealthDay)—If you suffer from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), a flu shot can be a lifesaver. But many of the millions with the lung condition don't get it, researchers report.

COPD causes inflammation in the lungs and it can flare up when triggered by the flu, making the infection worse, explained lead researcher Dr. Sunita Mulpuru. She is an associate scientist at Ottawa Hospital in Canada.

Not only is the flu bad, but other complications, such as pneumonia, can be even worse, she added.

"Approximately one in 10 pass away, and one in five develop critical illness requiring admission to the intensive care unit [in a hospital]," Mulpuru said.

But getting a flu shot lowers the odds of being hospitalized for flu-related illness by 38 percent, her team discovered.

"Despite that finding, only 66 percent of the patients in this study were vaccinated," Mulpuru noted.

In addition, the antiviral medications Tamiflu and Relenza, which can make flu less severe, were only used 69 percent of the time, the findings showed. Moreover, the drugs weren't given early in the hospital, when they can be most effective, she said.

These drugs were most often given when patients were headed to the [intensive care unit](#), "which is too late," Mulpuru said.

Dr. MeiLan Han, a spokeswoman for the American Lung Association and a professor of internal medicine at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, said more COPD patients need to get vaccinated.

"There are a lot of misconceptions out there," Han said. "I hear things like 'I've never had the flu, so I don't think I'll ever get it,' which is a bit of a falsehood."

Many people don't understand the flu is much worse than a bad cold and can be life-threatening, she noted. "In the best case, you feel deathly miserable for a week or two," Han said.

Some patients fear that they can get the flu from the vaccine. But that simply isn't so, she added.

Although it's too early to tell how bad this year's flu season will be, the last season sent nearly one million Americans to the hospital and killed 80,000, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

For the study, Mulpuru and colleagues collected data on nearly 4,200 COPD patients hospitalized for acute respiratory illness.

After checking their flu vaccination status, the investigators found that COPD patients who had a flu shot were 38 percent less likely to be hospitalized for flu-related illness.

Moreover, COPD patients with the flu were more likely to die than those without the disease (10 percent versus 8 percent). These patients were also more likely to be critically ill (17 percent versus 12 percent), the findings showed.

Patients most at risk were those over age 75, those with heart disease and those who needed to use oxygen at home, the researchers reported.

The report was published in the January issue of the journal *Chest*.

Dr. Len Horovitz is a pulmonary specialist at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City. He said, "This study documents what doctors always tell patients in trying to 'sell' the [flu shot](#)."

Vaccination does reduce hospitalization in [patients](#) with COPD who contract influenza, Horovitz said.

"It follows that a milder attack of flu will not generate as many complications necessitating hospitalization," he added. "That's a great benefit of vaccination, even when the flu breaks through the vaccination barrier."

**More information:** For more on COPD, visit the [American Lung Association](#).

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