

National Immunization Awareness Month is Not Just for Kids!

August is National Immunization Awareness Month! While many consider this to be a time to ensure that children are immunized for school, it also provides a good opportunity to speak with your Medicare patients about their immunizations.

Medicare covers both the cost of pneumococcal and influenza vaccine and their administration by recognized providers. No beneficiary co-insurance or co-payment applies and a beneficiary does not have to meet his or her deductible to receive an influenza or pneumococcal immunization. Medicare also covers hepatitis B vaccination for persons at high or intermediate risk. The coinsurance or co-payment applies for hepatitis B vaccination after the yearly deductible has been met.

Despite Medicare coverage, the use of these benefits is not optimal. In 2004, Medicare survey data indicate a 73% influenza vaccination rate for facility and community-dwelling Medicare beneficiaries, and a 67% pneumococcal vaccination rate for the same population. Additionally, dialysis patients are under-immunized. Vaccines are one of public health's great triumphs. With the exception of safe water, no other health strategy has had such a tremendous effect on reducing disease and improving health. Maintaining high immunization rates protects the entire community and is an important public health matter.

Why Immunize Adults? An average of 36,000 Americans die from influenza or its complications each year. The National Center for Health Statistics reported influenza and pneumonia to be the primary causes of death for more than 57,000 older adults in 2003. Pneumococcal disease occurs year round and accounts for approximately 40,000 cases of invasive disease and 5,000 deaths per year in the United States.

For all persons age 65 or older, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) and other leading authorities recommend lifetime vaccination against pneumococcal disease and annual vaccination against influenza. Medicare will cover a booster pneumococcal vaccine for high risk persons if five (5) years have passed since their last vaccination.

What's New?

- Nursing home residents are especially vulnerable to influenza and pneumonia and their complications. Beginning September 1, 2006, influenza and pneumococcal vaccination assessments will be included as part of the Minimum Data Set (MDS) for nursing homes.
- As of January 2005, all newly enrolled Medicare beneficiaries are covered for an initial physical examination that includes immunization for pneumococcal disease and influenza.
- As of January 2005, physicians can be paid for injections and immunizations administered to people with Medicare, even when administered during a visit which includes other Medicare-covered services.
- As of October 2002, hospitals, long-term care facilities and home health agencies participating in Medicare and Medicaid programs can administer influenza and pneumococcal vaccinations according to a standing orders protocol without the need for a physician's examination or direct order.
- Quality Improvement Organizations in each state are working to increase immunization rates in hospitals, physicians' offices, home health care settings and nursing homes.

How Can You Help? As a trusted source, your recommendation is the most important factor in increasing immunization rates among adults.

For More Information

For more information about Medicare’s adult immunization benefits, billing Medicare for vaccinations, and other helpful information, visit the CMS Web site:

http://www.cms.hhs.gov/AdultImmunizations/01_Overview.asp .

National Immunization Awareness Month is the perfect time to remind patients, health care employees, family members, friends, co-workers and others to get up-to-date on their vaccinations. To paraphrase a quote from the great hockey player Wayne Gretzky, “Your patients will miss 100% of the shots they never take.” Let’s protect people with Medicare by making sure that each August they have received their lifetime pneumococcal immunization, they have been assessed for their risk for hepatitis B, and they have an appointment to obtain their influenza vaccination in the fall.

CMS has also developed a variety of educational products and resources to help health care professionals and their staff become familiar with coverage, coding, billing, and reimbursement for all preventive services covered by Medicare.

- The MLN Preventive Services Educational Products Web Page ~ provides descriptions and ordering information for all provider specific educational products related to preventive services. The web page is located at http://www.cms.hhs.gov/MLNProducts/35_PreventiveServices.asp on the CMS website.
- The CMS Website provides information for each preventive service covered by Medicare. Click on www.cms.hhs.gov, select “Medicare”, and scroll down to “Prevention”.

For products to share with your Medicare patients, visit www.medicare.gov on the Web.

As always, thanks so much for helping CMS spread the word about immunizations and all preventive services covered by Medicare.