

Meet The Faces Of Influenza



(NAPSA)—We all know someone who needs to be vaccinated against the influenza virus this year.

With over 200 million people in the U.S. being part of a group that health officials recommend receive influenza vaccination, it is likely that you or a family member need to be immunized each year.

Influenza results in an average of 36,000 deaths and approximately 226,000 hospitalizations in the U.S. each year. Despite these numbers, many Americans think influenza won't affect their families. Influenza is not the common cold. It's serious.

Influenza vaccination is a safe and effective way to help prevent influenza. Unfortunately, too many people still believe the myth that an annual immunization can cause influenza. With the influenza season upon us, it is important to consult your health care provider to learn more about influenza and the importance of an annual immunization.

Included in the *Faces of Influenza* are famous and not so famous Americans who take influenza seriously and get immunized each year.

Here are some of their stories:

Actress Jean Smart

Actress Jean Smart has type 1 diabetes, a chronic medical condition she's lived with and managed for years. As most people who live with diabetes do, she makes sure to keep her health in balance to stay well for her demanding career and for her family.

"Most people don't realize how severely influenza can affect people with conditions like diabetes, asthma or cancer. For people with these conditions, influenza immunization is critical," she says.

Smart, who was one of TV's beloved *Designing Women* and remains a star of film and theater,

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American Lung Association's
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places a great value on influenza immunization as part of her care—and for her family.

"We live in a world where people tend to take risks. Avoiding influenza immunization should not be one of those risks. One simple vaccination every year is all it takes," says Smart.

"Take influenza seriously. I do, and I hope everyone who reads this message gets serious about vaccination and shares this concern with their families and others they care about."

The Aston Family

Lakisha Aston has five children, three with asthma. This chronic respiratory disease is always a looming threat, but never more than during influenza season.

Aston has learned that the hard way.

"As a parent, I'm really scared. Asthma can kill a child. When Dimitri and Brandon got influenza, it was because they couldn't get the vaccine that year, and their asthma got much worse."

For otherwise healthy children, a bout with influenza may keep them off their feet for four to five days. For an asthmatic child who hasn't been vaccinated, the illness can drag on for two weeks or more with the risk of added respiratory damage.

Aston says she's amazed at how many parents fail to immunize their children. "I recently had a friend—who also has three kids with asthma—say to me that the influenza vaccine was just for older people," she said. "Everyone needs to know how important the vaccine is for children and get their kids vaccinated, whether they have asthma or not."

Rick Cerett

December 2003 was a time of particular joy for the Jackson family—their nearly 6-month-old twins, Marques Maurice, Jr. and Chalise, were about to celebrate their first Christmas. Then Marques started to come down with what the family thought was a cold.

Rick Cerett, the twins' grandfather, remembers it this way: "Marques came down with a fever and runny nose on Christmas Eve and the doctor said it was influenza. By Christmas day, he was having trouble breathing and nothing seemed to help."

Within three days, Marques was dead.

The tragedy has made Cerett a crusader for yearly influenza vaccinations for parents and caretakers. "You think of influenza killing older people," he says. "But if you're around an infant, you need to get the vaccine and, once your kids are old enough, they need to be vaccinated, too."

The American Lung Association asks every family to see if its members are among the many *Faces of Influenza*—high-risk individuals or those in close contact with high-risk people who should receive influenza immunizations every year. To learn more about the high-risk groups recommended for influenza immunization, visit the Lung Association's *Faces of Influenza* Web site at www.facesofinfluenza.org.