

Health Awareness

Understanding The Seriousness Of The Flu

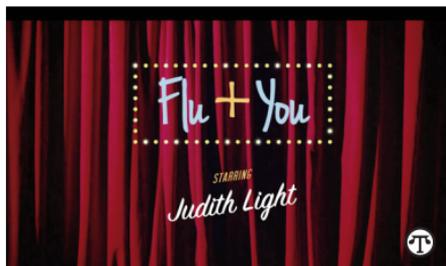
(NAPSA)—If you or someone you care about is among the estimated 45 million Americans who are 65 years of age and older, there's an important health fact you should know: As you age, your immune system weakens. This can make influenza ("the flu") severe and even life threatening for older adults. The 2014–2015 flu season recorded the highest hospitalization rates among people 65 years of age and older in recent history, yet a new survey of more than 1,000 U.S. seniors found that many underestimate the seriousness of the flu and are largely unaware of their vaccine options.

To help educate older adults and those who care for them about the seriousness of the flu, the importance of prevention and available vaccine options, two-time Emmy and Tony award-winning actress Judith Light—starring in the new Broadway play *Thérèse Raquin*—has joined the *Flu + You* program for the second year in a row as the campaign ambassador.

"I turned 65 last year, and even though I still feel healthy and active, I know my immune system weakens with age," said Light. "I can't afford to let the flu slow me down, and luckily my doctor gave me a flu shot specifically for my age. If you're over 65 like me, talk to your health care provider about flu prevention and your flu vaccine options, and get vaccinated early before it's too late."

The flu can make existing health problems worse and is especially dangerous for people with chronic health conditions, like heart disease and diabetes, which commonly affect older adults. People with these conditions are more likely to develop complications from the flu that can result in hospitalization and even death.

"Adults 65 and over typically



In a PSA at ncoa.org/Flu, the National Council on Aging and Judith Light encourage people 65 plus to ask about their flu vaccine options.

account for roughly half of flu-related hospitalizations and almost all flu-related deaths, and yet the survey we conducted shows that only 8 percent of survey respondents are concerned about getting the flu," said Kathleen Cameron, MPH, Senior Director, National Council on Aging. "Furthermore, about one third of respondents are unaware that someone with chronic health conditions would be at risk for complications from the flu."

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states the single best way to prevent the flu is to get an annual vaccination. However, the survey found that more than half of seniors are unaware that there is a flu shot specifically for their age group. Older adults have flu vaccine options, including the regular flu shot and a higher-dose vaccine, both of which are widely available at a doctor's office or local pharmacy. Flu vaccination is a Medicare benefit with no copay.

Older adults and their caregivers can learn more at ncoa.org/Flu, which features more survey results, free educational materials, and a public service announcement with Judith Light.

Flu + You is a national public education initiative sponsored by the National Council on Aging in collaboration with Sanofi Pasteur.