

Pneumonia: A Disease Without a Season

Summer is a time when people are typically thinking about fun in the sun and less about guarding themselves against diseases that typically come in the winter time. However, there is at least one common illness that people can contract any time of year: pneumonia. That's why area doctors are encouraging older adults to protect themselves from the malady now.

According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) about 900,000 Americans get pneumonia, a lung infection caused by bacteria, viruses or fungi, every year. Dr. Brian Curtis, Director of Physician Practice for OSF HealthCare Medical Group, says the best way to prevent the disease is by getting vaccinated. He says the risk of not doing so is high for certain populations.

"It could cause you to be admitted to the hospital. And at times when that happens, the pneumococcal bacteria gets into your bloodstream and you develop what we call sepsis and people have been admitted to the ICU, placed on the ventilator and have died from it," warned Dr. Curtis.

Dr. Curtis added, this is especially the case with older individuals. In 2014, pneumonia killed more than 50,000 people in the U.S; about 84% of them were older than age 65.

"People over the age of 65 are more susceptible to having bad outcomes from any type of virus or bacterial illness and it's just an age-related phenomenon," he said. "Their immune system is just not as effective as it was at a younger age."

Dr. Curtis says those with weakened immune systems and children under the age of two are also at risk for pneumonia.

There are two pneumococcal vaccines recommended for older adults. Curtis recommends discussing options with a health care provider to determine which immunization is best for you. If you don't have a primary care physician, visit osfhealthcare.org to find one near you.