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Area Health Authorities Recommend Pneumococcal Vaccine Particularly During this Flu Season

Due to the recent flu vaccine shortage, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommended vaccinating only persons at highest risk of developing serious complications from the flu. As pneumococcal pneumonia is a serious complication of the flu, getting a pneumococcal vaccine is very important for high-risk groups. With this in mind, Harris County Public Health and Environmental Services, Harris County Hospital District and the Houston Department of Health and Human Services join together to encourage at risk people to get vaccinated against pneumococcal disease.

The pneumococcal vaccine protects you from developing pneumococcal disease, a bacterial illness which can cause serious infections in your lungs (pneumonia), blood or brain (meningitis). "While pneumococcal disease can be dangerous for anyone, there are some people for whom it is a particularly serious. It is especially important for all senior citizens and persons with certain medical conditions to receive a pneumococcal vaccine, especially during this flu season," stated Dr. Herminia Palacio, Executive Director of Harris County Public Health and Environmental Services.

Each year, pneumococcal disease kills more people in the United States than all other vaccine-preventable diseases combined including the flu. Anyone can become ill with this disease, but the following are considered most at risk of becoming ill with this disease:

- all people 65 years or older;
- people who have problems with their lungs, heart, liver or kidneys; and,
- anyone with health problems like diabetes, sickle cell disease, alcoholism, or HIV/AIDS.

Over the years, pneumococcal disease has become resistant to many drugs and therefore has become more difficult to treat. The best way to protect yourself is to get vaccinated. A second dose is recommended all people aged 65 or older who got their first dose before they turned 60. Others who may need a second dose are those who:

- have a damaged spleen or no spleen
- have sickle cell disease, cancer leukemia, lymphoma, multiple myeloma
- are experiencing kidney failure
- were the recipient of an organ or bone marrow transplant
- are taking medication that lowers immunity
- have nephrotic syndrome

The pneumococcal vaccine is very safe and does not make you sick. Some people get a little swelling and soreness where they get the shot, but this usually goes away in a day or two. You can get the vaccine at any Harris County Public Health and Environmental Services or Houston Department of Health and Human Services health clinic. Harris County Hospital District will provide the pneumococcal vaccine to its health center patients. Alternatively, you can also go to your primary care provider to get the shot.

For more information on pneumococcal disease or the pneumococcal vaccine go to www.cdc.gov.

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