

August 2008

## Did You Get Your Shots Yet?

By: Erin Ulibarri, MPH  
Office on Aging

Vaccinations are not just for kids. As a person ages, booster shots are often needed so that the vaccinations received in childhood are still effective as adults. Older adults are especially at risk for infectious diseases because of the natural decline of the immune system later in life.

August is *National Immunization Awareness Month* and a great time to review your vaccination history with your healthcare professional. Older adults are advised to get the pneumonia and shingles vaccinations once after 60 years of age. The flu shot is strongly encouraged once each year during the fall. Also, make sure you have received a tetanus shot within the last ten years—and stay up to date on getting those tetanus boosters.

Since the introduction of the shingles vaccine in 2006 and a recommendation by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for those over 60 years to get immunized, the topic has been more prominent in the media. Shingles is caused by the same virus as chicken pox, so if you had chicken pox as a child you could get shingles. The virus is reactivated when the immune system is weakened, such as with stress or illness. It produces a painful rash, fever, headache, and chills and affects people over 50 years old more often than younger adults. Each year, over 1 million people in the United States suffer from shingles.

Medicare currently covers the flu, pneumococcal (pneumonia), and Hepatitis B shots, but not shingles. However, many Medicare Part D plans do. In addition, many doctors do not keep the shingles vaccine in their office and you will have to go to a pharmacy to obtain it. The County of Orange Office on Aging has a list of pharmacies that either stock or can order the shingles vaccine.

The Office on Aging at **1-800-510-2020** or **1-714-567-7500** can help you stay organized. The friendly and caring Information Specialists can send you an immunization schedule chart, information on shingles, locate a pharmacy for the shingles vaccine, and connect you with a Health Insurance Counseling and Advocacy Program (HICAP) specialist who can find out if your Medicare Part D Plan covers the shingles vaccine. The Office on Aging Information Specialists can also answer your questions concerning other older adult services, such as housing, transportation, medical and health information, caregiving, and much more.