

Updated (Bivalent) Boosters & Older Adults: What you need to know

Older adults are at highest risk of severe disease and death from COVID-19

Older age remains the strongest risk factor for severe COVID-19 outcomes. Throughout the pandemic, older adults have experienced the highest hospitalization rates of any age group. During the Delta and Omicron periods, the proportion of adults 65 and older who were hospitalized increased compared to previous periods of time in the pandemic. Data suggests that 90% of COVID-19 hospitalizations during the most recent Omicron wave were among this group.

On average, more than 300 people are dying each day in the U.S. from COVID-19, and most of these deaths are among those 65 and older. Notably, people 65 and older account for only 16% of the total U.S. population but have represented 75% of all COVID-19 deaths to date. In October 2022, nine out of ten deaths from the virus in our country were among those 65 and older.

Only 1 in 3 older adults is considered up to date on COVID-19 vaccination

An individual is considered up to date on COVID-19 vaccination if they have completed a primary vaccine series and have received the most recent booster dose recommended by the CDC (when they are eligible). While a majority of people 65 and older have completed their COVID-19 vaccine primary series (94%), only 33% have received their updated booster dose. When looking specifically at nursing home residents and staff, as of late October 2022, only two in five residents and less than a quarter of nursing home healthcare staff were up to date on COVID-19 vaccination in the U.S.

Updated (bivalent) boosters provide additional protection against COVID-19

COVID-19 vaccines can help protect against severe COVID-19 outcomes, like hospitalization and death. However, as the virus changes and immunity naturally decreases over time, individuals may lose some of that protection. The best way to protect older adults from COVID-19 is to make sure they are up to date on COVID-19 vaccination.

In September 2022, the CDC recommended an updated (bivalent) booster to provide better protection against circulating Omicron variants. This updated booster provides protection against the original virus strain and the more recently circulating Omicron BA.4 and BA.5 variants. Data out of Canada suggests that individuals 70 years and older who have received under two doses of COVID-19 vaccination have a ten times greater risk of hospitalization and a 15-17x higher risk of dying from COVID-19 compared to those who are one month out from a fourth dose of COVID-19 vaccine. Furthermore, recent data shows that people who received the updated booster were fifteen times less likely to die from COVID-19 compared to people who are not vaccinated.

People 65 and older have consistently accounted for a larger share of COVID-19-associated hospitalization and deaths throughout the entire pandemic. While high primary vaccination rates among this age group have given hope and saved many lives, it is very important for older adults to stay up to date on COVID-19 vaccination to prevent severe COVID-19 outcomes. Currently available vaccines and treatments are our best fight against this virus, particularly among the older population.



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