Vaccination Linked to a Reduction of Over a Quarter Million COVID-19 Cases Among Seniors

Vaccines also prevented 100,000 hospitalizations and 39,000 deaths in this population.

October 19, 2021 By Department of Health and Human Services

A new report from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) shows that COVID-19 vaccinations may have helped prevent hundreds of thousands of new COVID-19 infections and tens of thousands of deaths among seniors.

The study, which was conducted by researchers with HHS's Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), found that vaccinations were linked to a reduction of approximately 265,000 COVID-19 infections, 107,000 hospitalizations, and 39,000 deaths among Medicare beneficiaries between January and May 2021.

"This report reaffirms what we hear routinely from states: COVID-19 vaccines save lives, prevent hospitalizations, and reduce infection," said HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra. "The Biden-Harris Administration has prioritized getting vaccines quickly to pharmacies, nursing homes, doctors' offices and even provided increased reimbursement rates for at-home COVID-19 vaccinations, so that seniors and others can easily get vaccinated."

Today's report reflects the devastating effect COVID-19 has had on our vulnerable seniors and demonstrates that efforts to prioritize and vaccinate this group directly correlate to saving lives. More than 352,000 lives were lost during the first nine months of the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to the availability of vaccines, nearly 80% of these deaths were among people 65 and older who were also Medicare eligible.

For the period of January to May 2021, when vaccination grew from 1% to 47% among adults 18 to 64 and from 1% to 80% among seniors, the study found an 11% to 12% decrease in weekly COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths among Medicare beneficiaries for every 10% increase in county vaccination rates.

All racial and ethnic groups and all 48 states analyzed experienced reduced numbers of COVID-19 deaths, hospitalizations, and infections, linked to vaccination rate increases. Texas and Hawaii were excluded from this analysis due to data reporting limitations. American Indian and Alaska

Native Medicare beneficiaries saw the largest vaccination-related percentage decrease in SARS-CoV-2 infections, hospitalizations, and deaths. The study also found that vaccines were linked to a reduction of about 5,600 deaths among nursing home Medicare beneficiaries, a group that was disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

Today's report further underscores why it's critically important to get all eligible individuals living in the United States vaccinated against COVID-19. The study found that high vaccination rates for all adults were even more protective for Medicare beneficiaries than just a high elderly vaccination rate on its own. The COVID-19 vaccines protect communities by reducing infections, deaths, and hospitalizations.

Recently, Secretary Becerra issued a directive, effective September 25, authorizing all CDC COVID-19 Vaccination Program providers to make available and administer Pfizer-BioNTech booster doses to all people who are eligible. This includes seniors over age 65. The science has demonstrated this authorized booster can provide added protection to seniors. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services also issued a reminder to Medicare beneficiaries that all COVID-19 vaccines, including the authorized booster will be covered without cost-sharing.

Click here to read the ASPE report on COVID-19 vaccination rates.

This news release was originally published by the Department of Health and Human Services on October 5, 2021.

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