



Influenza: Vaccination against flu for people aged 60 and older

Should I get myself vaccinated every year?



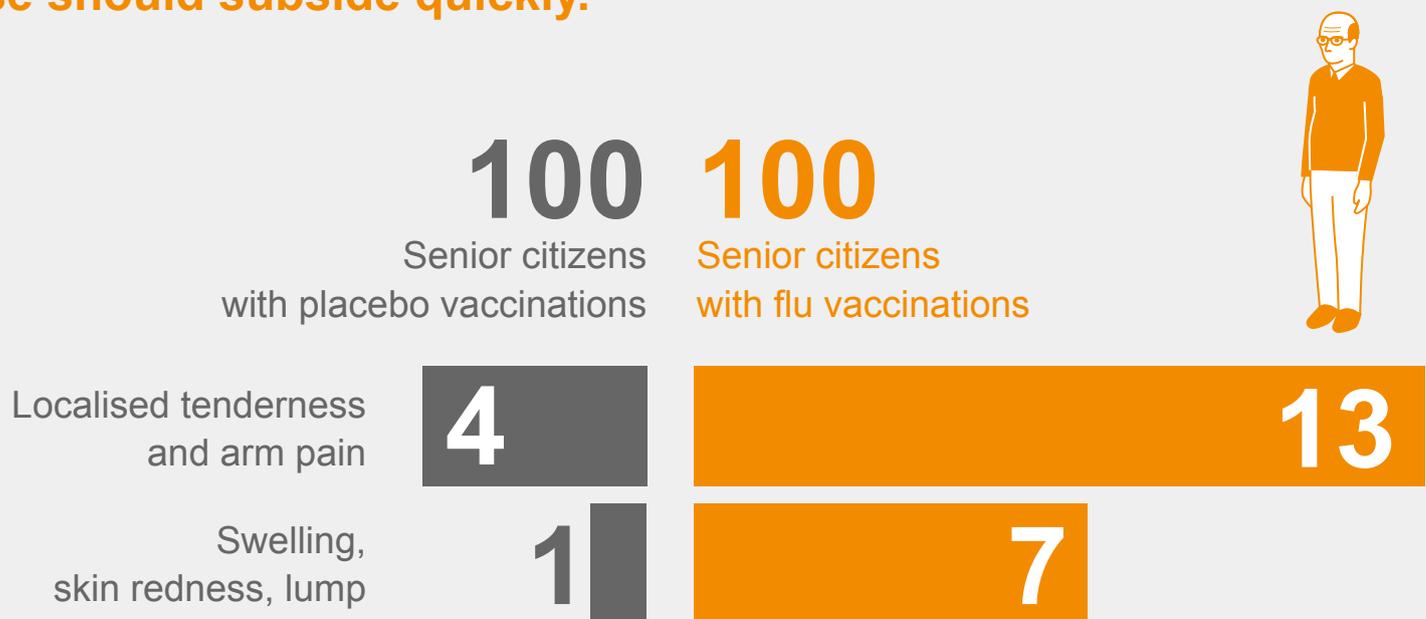
Benefit: The vaccine can prevent a severe case of flu.

	without flu vaccination	with flu vaccination
Senior citizens	per 100	per 100
Typical flu symptoms	10	6
Hospitalisation: influenza infection or pneumonia	2	1
Deaths: all causes	2	1

✓ Explanations and sources



Side effects: If you experience symptoms such as redness and pain, these should subside quickly.



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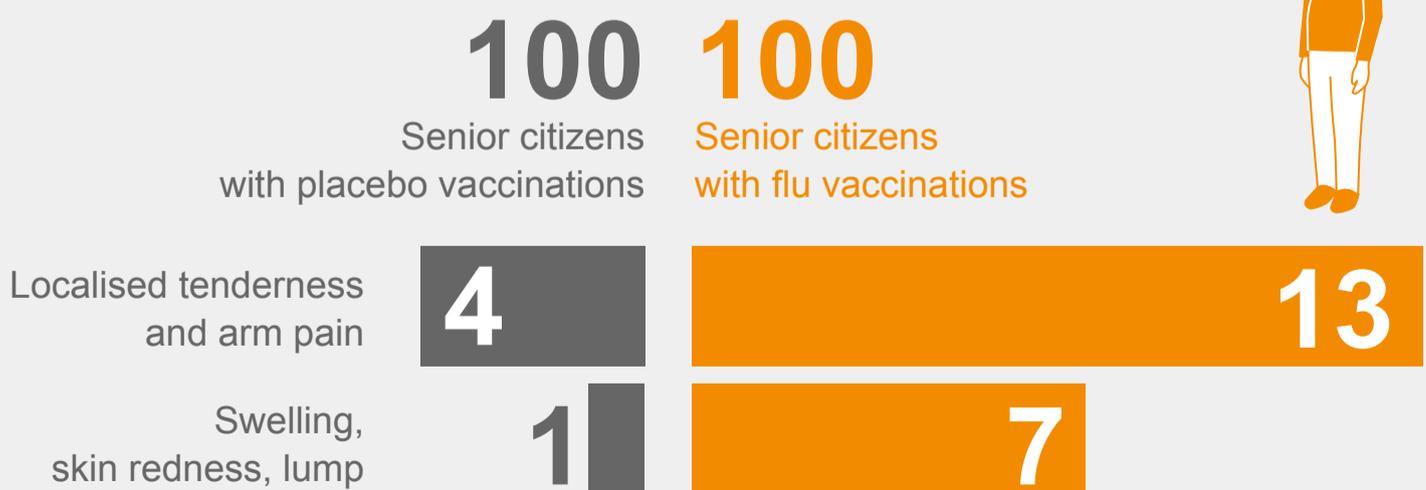
Explanations and sources

The Permanent Commission on Vaccination (STIKO) in Germany recommends annual vaccination against influenza for people 60 years and older, as well as people in certain fields of employment. The vaccine is intended to protect the elderly and the chronically ill against typical flu symptoms that are described as symptoms of influenza-like illness (ILI). As defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO), these symptoms include fever of 38 °C or higher, and sore throat with cough. In contrast, the common cold cannot be avoided by having the vaccination. The benefit of the vaccination depends on how it matches the seasonal virus. For example, a matching vaccine prevents two of the four confirmed cases of influenza in 100 senior citizens within one year.

The table shows that of 100 senior citizens aged 60 or over who received a flu vaccination, 6 showed flu symptoms within one year. In the group of senior citizens who hadn't been vaccinated, 10 out of 100 showed symptoms. Those who didn't get a flu vaccination instead received a placebo injection containing a saline solution, for instance. The difference between the two groups was further confirmed through clinical laboratory testing of the pathogens. Normally the doctor makes a diagnosis on the basis of the patient's symptoms without laboratory testing. The data are rounded.

Sources: Jefferson et al. (2010). [Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, Second edition, Art. No.: CD004876](#) (The incidence of flu or typical flu symptoms from two randomised studies with 2,000 participants aged 60 and over). Hospitalisation rate is based on six cohort studies with more than 700,000 participants over 65 and mortality rate on four cohort studies with more than 300,000 over 65. These comprised sick and healthy people in years of flue epidemic.

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Explanations and sources

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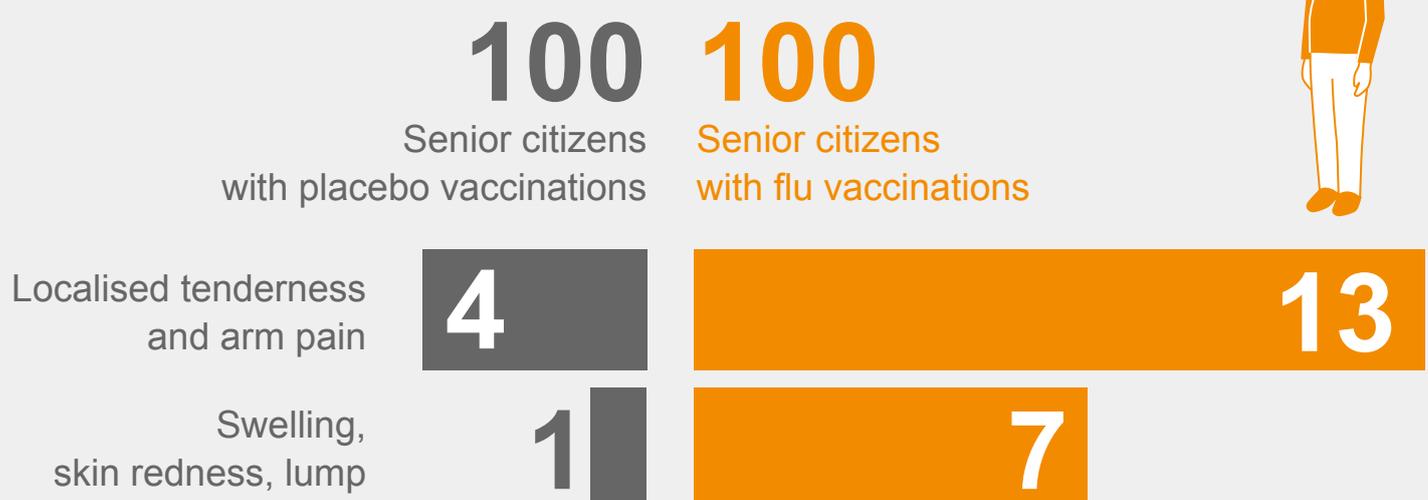
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The figures show that 13 out of 100 vaccinated senior citizens experienced arm pain, compared to just 4 in a group of senior citizens who were not vaccinated. In order to be able to compare both experimental groups, one group was given an injection with flu vaccine and the other an injection with a placebo substance. That explains why some people in this group could have also experienced subsequent side effects. The data are rounded.

Sources: Jefferson et al. (2010). [Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, Issue 2. Art. No.: CD004876](#) (The incidence of pain or changes to skin according to four and two randomised controlled studies with 2,500 and 1,800 participants, respectively).

Scientific development: Prof. Dr. med. A. Altiner, Director at the Institute for General Medical Science at the Rostock University School of Medicine.

The AOK, the federal association of health insurance funds, is developing its fact boxes together with Prof. Dr. Gerd Gigerenzer, director of the Harding Centre for Risk Literacy at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Berlin.

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