

New vaccine strategy better protects high-risk cancer patients from flu

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Yale Cancer Center researchers have developed a vaccine strategy that reduces the risk of flu infections in cancer patients at highest risk for influenza. The findings were presented Dec. 6 at the 57th annual meeting of the American Society of Hematology in Orlando, Florida.

Patients with cancers of the immune system, like multiple myeloma, are especially susceptible to common infections, and a bout of the flu can lead to serious illness and even death. Even though [patients](#) with [multiple myeloma](#) and other plasma cell disorders may receive an annual flu vaccine, studies show that a one-time flu shot does not offer adequate immune response.

The Yale researchers developed a strategy that entailed offering patients a high-dose flu vaccine followed by a second high-dose booster shot one month later. The high-dose vaccine (Fluzone High-Dose) was approved in 2009 by the FDA as a single dose for adults over 65.

The booster strategy lowered the flu infection rate among patients to 6% versus an expected rate of 20%, and it improved protection against all flu strains covered by the vaccine in 66% of patients, said the study's first author Andrew Branagan, M.D., a postdoctoral associate in medicine (hematology).

"Using an approved [flu vaccine](#) in a novel dosing schedule yielded promising results for a group patients at high risk for infection," Branagan said. "We hope to confirm these results in a larger prospective

randomized trial that is underway now at Yale during the 2015-2016 [flu](#) season. We suspect this strategy could benefit other cancer patient populations."

Provided by Yale University

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