



818 18th Street, NW • Suite 1000 • Washington, DC 20006  
202.728.7199 • fax: 202.728.7238 • [www.womenheart.org](http://www.womenheart.org)

## Is it wise to immunize?

### *Vaccinations and heart disease*

If you are a woman with heart disease, you have a lot of things to think about: prescription drugs, over-the-counter medications, cholesterol, blood pressure — the list can seem endless. Now you can add one more item: vaccinations. These days it is fairly easy to wander into just about any supermarket and get a flu shot, but it's important to know what types of vaccinations (also known as immunizations) are safe for those with heart disease. Here's a list of what you should know — then make sure to talk with your health care provider before you get your next shot.

#### Vaccination 101

- **Flu shots:** Yes, a flu shot is a good idea for anyone with heart disease — and even for their family members, so that they don't unintentionally pass along any nasty viruses. Heart patients are at greater risk for complications from influenza than the general public, possibly because the illness inflames the arteries. Most importantly, you should get a shot, not use the flu nasal spray (FluMist), because the spray is made with a live virus that can cause those with heart disease to actually come down with the flu.
- **Pneumonia vaccine:** Some women under the age of 65 may have never even heard of this vaccine, but it is generally recommended for anyone of any age who has heart disease. The vaccine has caused some controversy because it has been tricky to determine if it actually decreases the incidence of pneumonia, but many doctors believe that it does and some research suggests that it may even significantly reduce heart attacks.
- **Smallpox vaccine:** This vaccine was widely used until the early 1970s and today is not available to the general public. However, members of the military and some scientists and health care workers do receive the vaccine; concern about smallpox increased a few years ago in response to possible bioterrorism threats. The disease itself was globally eradicated in the 70s and today only exists in laboratories. No matter what, people with heart disease should not receive this vaccine unless they have actually been exposed to smallpox, because of the possibility of serious side effects.
- **Is there a heart disease vaccine?** No, not yet. But researchers in Sweden are studying a cholesterol vaccine that may stop continuing damage to arteries and possibly even reverse the process of atherosclerosis. Keep your eye out for news on this over the next few years as research continues.

*Resources:*

**Flu shots: Especially important if you have heart disease**

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/flu-shots/HB00086>

**CDC pneumocccal vaccine recommendations**

<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/pneumo/in-short-both.htm#who>

**Pneumonia Vaccine Lowers Chances of Heart Attack**

<http://health.usnews.com/health-news/family-health/heart/articles/2008/10/06/pneumonia-vaccine-lowers-chances-of-heart-attack>

**Smallpox Vaccine**

<http://familydoctor.org/online/famdocen/home/healthy/vaccines/740.html>

**The vaccine that could save you from heart disease**

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-1284796/The-vaccine-save-heart-disease.html>