

# Beware Flu, pneumonia: they can kill

It's flu and pneumonia season. For many Americans this is a matter of life and death.

People in certain high-risk categories, such as those age 65 and older, and those suffering from chronic lung or heart disease, are in greatest danger from flu and its complications, according to the American Lung Association of Southeast Michigan, the Christmas Seal People.

The reason is that complications of flu, usually just a moderately serious illness in healthy children and adults, can be life-threatening and even fatal for those at high risk.

The most common and serious complication of influenza is bacterial pneumonia, because the body can be so weakened from flu or from underlying disease that its defenses are lowered. In each of several recent flu epidemics, 40,000 excess deaths occurred from flu and pneumonia — about 80-90 percent of these deaths were among high-risk individuals.

"Yet, this number could be substantially reduced if people in high-risk groups would get their flu shots and their pneumococcal pneumonia vaccination," said Kathleen Robinson of the American Lung Association of Southeast Michigan. (The pneumococcal pneumonia vaccine protects against one common form of pneumonia.)

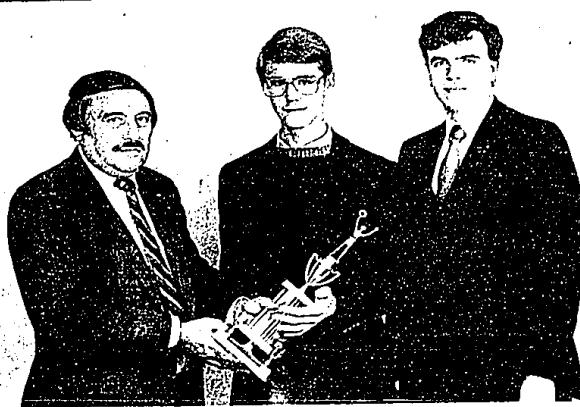
THOSE AT greatest risk from flu and pneumonia include: older adults, especially those over 65; adults and children who have chronic illness such as long-term lung or heart problems, kidney disease or diabetes; or patients who are being discharged from a hospital or are residents of nursing homes or other long-term health care facilities. The health care providers for these people should also get a flu shot.

According to Robinson, flu and pneumonia combined have ranked as

the sixth leading cause of death in the United States every year since 1979. In 1985, the 94 million reported episodes of flu were responsible for 548 million restricted activity days and 188.5 million sick bed days. "That's why we are making a major effort to reach people with this information," she continued.

The ALA has produced radio and TV news footage as part of a media public education effort on flu and pneumonia prevention. This was made possible by an educational grant from Lederle Laboratories.

The best time for vaccination is well before mid-November. This allows time for lots of antibodies to build up before the peak flu season. Influenza shots need to be taken yearly since the strains change each season. The pneumococcal pneumonia vaccine, however, is a once-in-a-lifetime shot, and is reimbursable by Medicare.



## Carrier of the Year

Jeff Black (center) was named the Farmington Observer's Carrier of the Year for 1987. He was honored at the annual Carrier of the Year night Oct. 20 in the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers' Livonia office. At left is Fred Wright, O&E circulation director. At right is Randall C. Budden, Farmington area circulation manager. Selection was based on six factors: length of service, amount of collections, prompt settling of account, few customer complaints, neat organization of route books, proper up-to-date records and prior naming as a Carrier of the Month.

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