Longer Season for Influenza Vaccination Urged

BY ALICIA AULT
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WASHINGTON — For the second year in a row, federal officials and professional societies are urging health care providers to administer influenza vaccination beyond the traditional months of October and November.

A record number of doses will be available, they said at a press briefing highlighting persistent gaps in vaccination coverage for the most vulnerable populations—children and the elderly. The officials also encouraged providers to be more aggressive in offering pneumococcal vaccine to patients over age 65.

Influenza leads to 36,000 deaths and 200,000 hospitalizations each year. It disproportionately affects the very young, and those with chronic disease. For instance, infections trigger up to 92,000 cardiac deaths per year, according to the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases, which sponsored the briefing.

Dr. Julie Gerberding, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said that manufacturers are on track to deliver about 132 million doses of influenza vaccine this season, which would be the largest amount of vaccine ever produced. Although manufacturers could run into problems delivering those doses, as has happened in the past, “every indication is that the supply is not going to be the rate-limiting step for us,” she said.

The biggest hurdle in raising vaccination rates is misperceptions among providers and patients, she and others noted during the briefing.

Many patients mistakenly believe that influenza vaccination causes illness. “It does not cause flu in any way, shape, or form,” Dr. Gerberding said, calling on physicians to help dispel this myth. Influenza vaccination rates are below goal for high-risk patients aged 18-49 (30%), healthy adults aged 50-64 (37%), and all adults over age 65 (69%), according to data from the 2005-2006 flu season, which was presented by Dr. Jeanne M. Santoli, deputy director of the Immunization Services Division at the CDC’s National Center for Immunization. During the 2005-2006 flu season, only 21% of children under age 2 years, and children under age 5 years who received at least one dose of the vaccine, the rate fell from 33% in 2004-2005 to 21% in 2005-2006. For children aged 6-23 months in 2004-2005, influenza vaccination rates ranged from a low of 8% in the second season since ACIP began recommending annual influenza vaccination in 2004-2005 to 21% in 2005-2006.

Dr. Santoli said. The results are based on a sample of 13,546 children from across the country (MMWR 2007;56:953-9).

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The 2005-2006 coverage levels were similar to those reported during the previous season. Results from the 2006 National Immunization Survey found that 32% of children aged 6-23 months received at least one dose of the vaccine in the 2005-2006 season and 21% were fully vaccinated in accordance with recommendations from the CDC’s Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP).

The data reflect vaccination uptake in the second season since ACIP began recommending annual influenza vaccination for children aged 6-23 months in 2004. The results are based on a sample of 13,546 children from across the country (MMWR 2007;56:959-63).

The 2005-2006 coverage levels were similar to those reported during the previous influenza season. The national estimate for fully vaccinated children increased from 18% in 2004-2005 to 21% in 2005-2006. For children who received at least one dose of the vaccine, the rate fell from 33% in 2004-2005 to 32% in 2005-2006.

In addition to the national figures, CDC also analyzed state vaccination rates and found significant variation across states. For example, the percentage of children who received at least one dose of influenza vaccine ranged from a low of 8% in Mississippi to a high of 51% in Connecticut. No state had more than 40% of children fully vaccinated, according to the study.

CDC researchers also took an early look at influenza vaccination rates for the 2006-2007 season using data from six immunization information system sentinel sites, located in Arizona, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, Oregon, and the District of Columbia.

Researchers used the data from the sentinel sites to gauge compliance with a June 2006 ACIP recommendation, which called for routine influenza vaccination among children aged 6-59 months. The early data revealed that at all six sites less than 30% of children aged 6-23 months had been fully vaccinated and less than 20% of children aged 24-59 months were fully vaccinated against influenza during the 2006-2007 season (MMWR 2007;56:963-5).

Influenza Vaccination Rates In Young Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage of Children Fully Vaccinated</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004-05</td>
<td>18%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005-06</td>
<td>21%</td>
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Less Than Quarter of Children Under 2 Years Get Flu Vaccine

BY MARY ELLEN SCHNEIDER
New York Bureau

Influenza vaccination rates for children aged 6-23 months remains low, with only 21% of children in this age group being fully vaccinated against influenza during the 2005-2006 season, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The vaccination rate was similar for the 24-59 month group—recently added to groups officially recommended to receive influenza vaccine—in preliminary data from the 2006-2007 season.

The approval was based on a pivotal study of 4,000 children aged 2-5 years who received the live attenuated vaccine during the 2004-2005 flu season. According to MedImmune, there was a 54% reduction in influenza in children cotreated with aspirin, or therapy contained with those who received a traditional injection.

The FluMist vaccine is contraindicated in those with asthma, children under age 2 years, and children under age 5 years who are at the risk for aspirin-exacerbated respiratory disease. The vaccine contains a small amount of aspirin, according to MedImmune.

The company will charge $17.95 per dose this flu season.