

CMS
Centers for Medicare
& Medicaid Services

7500 Security Blvd.
Baltimore, Maryland
21244-1850
<http://www.cms.gov>

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*It's important that
seniors get this
immunization*

FLU PNEUS

December 2003

'Tis (Still) the Season

Late season immunization push especially important this year

A consensus of major medical and health organizations has announced a major initiative in December aimed at encouraging a sustained vaccination campaign against one of the country's most deadly killers, influenza.

It may be more important than ever to push late-season immunization for influenza and pneumococcal around the country.

The influenza epidemics that are now raging through parts of Texas, Colorado and other states are highlighting the need to give a second effort at immunizing Americans this year. With recent years being relatively mild, some might be lulled into a false sense of security about a disease that kills 30,000 every year.



“Influenza generally peaks between January and March.” said Dr. Julie L Gerberding, Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. “We need to get the word out that there is vaccine available and a flu shot is the best protection against influenza, which kills about 36,000 Americans each year.”

The CDC is joining forces with the American Medical Association, National Foundation for Infectious Diseases and over 50 other health and medical organizations around the country to issue the appeal to continue immunization efforts around the country.

Vaccine Shortages

Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson announced in mid-December that 250,000 adult doses were being purchased and distributed to public health providers around the nation to bolster a vaccine supply that's been hit hard and hit early.

While over 83 million doses of influenza vaccine were produced for distribution this year, it appears that demand will outpace supply. In some ways, this situation is helpful in emphasizing the importance of immunization to the public.

At-Risk Populations

The shortages and early flu season also offer an opportunity to share the message of how important immunization is for the most at-risk populations, including seniors and other Medicare clientele.

Another important message is that even healthy family members of at-risk patients and health care providers should be immunized, regardless of their health status, because of the risk of infecting those with whom they have regular contact. While this advice is not a return to the so-called ‘tiered approach’ used in former seasons of shortages, it is a recognition that influenza is a deadly serious disease that must be fought, using strategic planning and efficient use of resources.

The e-mail is filled with links to articles archived on the INFORM site

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Contact: Joe Hutchison
jhutchison@okqio.sdps.org
405-840-2891

Have You Been INFORMed Yet?

The CDC offers a useful tool for program coordinators hoping to track media coverage of medical issues in their state and around the country.

Subscribers to the free service can track coverage by subject or by geographical groupings. The site archives past news coverage in the same ways. Users can also examine trends of media coverage as they build up or recede in the public's consciousness.

Another great feature is the periodic e-mail publication that updates subscribers to developments in various trends and ongoing issues associated with particular diseases. The e-mail is filled with links to articles archived on the INFORM site.

The site is not available to the general public, but is intended for various CDC partners working on campaigns. Quality Improvement Organizations and regional CMS flu coordinators have already been assigned codes for logging into the site.

A good training for maximum benefit is still available through Webex, via QIONet. The training took place on August 13, 2002 and is in the Webex database of previously recorded events.

For passwords, or to subscribe to the INFORM e-mail contact Alan Janssen at: axj3@cdc.gov

Vaccination Sites

There's going to be a little click, it won't hurt a bit

National Immunization Project Flu Page

is the CDC's homepage for Influenza and related issues has changed. Here's the new address:

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/>

Medicare Preventive Services Page

is devoted to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services Influenza and Pneumococcal campaign. Includes the "Flu Q&A."

<http://www.cms.hhs.gov/preventiveservices/2.asp>

MedQIC.org

(Medicare Quality Improvement Community) is the searchable resource for articles, links and other resources related to many topics and settings.

<http://www.medqic.org>

Immunize.org

is a great resource for information on pneumonia and related conditions.

<http://www.immunize.org/>

National Immunization Project Flu Gallery

offers many resources approved and made available by the CDC. Includes bilingual materials and many formats, including posters, stickers, etc.

<http://www.cdc.gov/nip/flu/gallery.htm>

On a Quest for Answers

Looking for an answer to an important medical quality question? Look no further! A new resource for medical quality is now available. Quest is a searchable database located on the QIONet server, linked from the main QIONet page at:

<http://qionet.sdps.org/> Under Applications>Quest Search, in the left navigation.

Quest is also linked from the MedQIC site, under *Resources*, as *FAQs*.

Searchers on Quest have several search options to access questions and answers from the database, and to submit their own questions for answers.

Questions currently in the database cover all topics and settings. Hundreds of questions have already been answered and archived for use.

Searchers on Quest have several search options

Think You Know the Answers?

Take a minute to try your hand at these influenza or pneumonia questions taken from the new Quest system.

- A. Some patients 65 years and over are not sure if they've had a pneumonia vaccination or not. Should they be vaccinated?
- B. Can hospitals get reimbursed for flu shots using the UB92 form?
- C. What's the difference between standing orders and pre-printed orders?
- D. Is pneumococcal vaccine contraindicated in patients on chronic prednisone?

Find the answers on page 4

What do we tell the public, our patients...our customers?

So, Where Do We Go From Here?

With so much in the news about the epidemic, vaccine shortages and mutated strains of influenza, what do we tell the public, our patients...our customers?

While ACIP has not returned to the 'tiered approach' for prioritizing vaccination, it becomes more essential than ever that at-risk seniors and other Medicare patients be vaccinated against influenza **AND** pneumococcal disease.

Here are some things we can do:

- **Practice good hygiene:** cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze, wash your hands
- **Make sure** seniors and other at-risk friends and family (including immunosuppressed) have an influenza and pneumococcal shot
- **Make sure** the people around your at-risk family – healthcare workers, family members, are vaccinated
- **Get the shot!** Even though the flu going around may be a different strain, the vaccine will offer protection

Pneumonia is largely avoidable through vaccination

The pneumonia vaccine is covered by Medicare

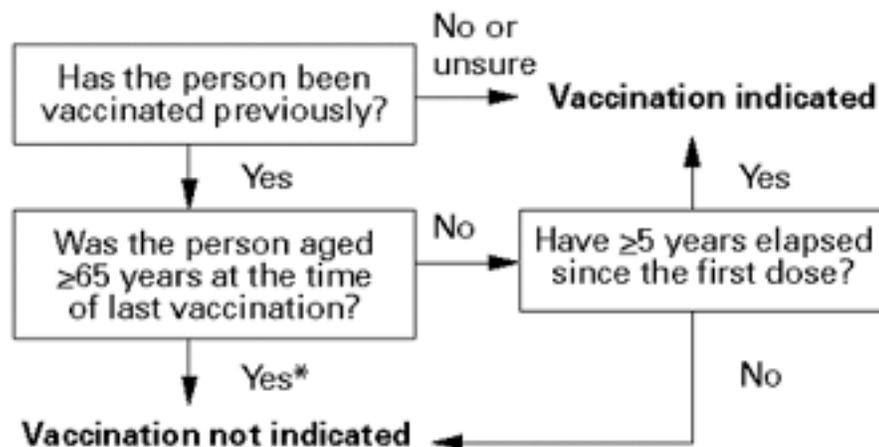
Pneumonia Shot Essential for Seniors

While influenza grips the American population and international headlines, another serious disease continues to kill Americans in large numbers, stalking our most at-risk populations, including the nation's elders.

Like influenza, pneumonia is largely avoidable through a vaccination that should be offered in conjunction with influenza immunization. Seniors are especially susceptible to this disease and they represent the overwhelming majority of patients who die from this disease every year.

The pneumococcal vaccination is not an annual requirement. One shot provides the patient good protection for years. Under the current ACIP guidelines, seniors 65 and over who were immunized against pneumonia once don't need another vaccination, unless 5 years have passed. The pneumonia vaccine is covered by Medicare.

Occasionally, elderly patients cannot remember if five years have passed since they received the shot, or if they have ever received one. Some patients are incapable of communicating this information. For these, the CDC recommends pneumonia vaccination; preferring to insure coverage, at the risk of repeating the vaccine.



*Note: For any person who has received a dose of pneumococcal vaccine at age ≥ 65 years, revaccination is not indicated.

From the MMWR at: <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/00047135.htm>

Answers for the Quest Quiz

- A. If a patient can't remember, they should be vaccinated.
- B. Hospitals can bill for immunization on a UB92, using the discharge date.
- C. Standing orders are administrative policy, that may be pre-printed.
- D. No, in general immuno-suppressed patients are good PPV candidates.

Complete answers are found at: <http://qionet.sdps.org/>