



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Public Health Service

Centers for Disease Control
and Prevention (CDC)
Atlanta GA 30333

August 22, 2013

Dear Colleague:

In your daily practice as a health care provider, you know the value of prevention and the positive impact it can have on your patients' health. I am writing today to encourage you to discuss the benefits of annual flu vaccination with your patients. Flu vaccination can reduce flu illness, antibiotic use, doctors' visits and lost time from work, as well as prevent hospitalizations and deaths.

The 2012-2013 influenza season was a reminder of how unpredictable and severe influenza can be. Influenza activity began early in the United States and was high for 15 weeks. The season also was more severe than recent seasons. Hospitalization rates, especially in older adults, were the highest recorded since CDC began tracking that data, and deaths attributed to pneumonia and influenza (P & I) were the highest recorded in nearly a decade. Sadly, the number of pediatric deaths (158) also was the highest since that type of surveillance began, with the exception of the 2009 H1N1 pandemic.

CDC currently recommends annual influenza vaccination for people 6 months of age and older with few exceptions. Studies have shown repeatedly that a health care provider's recommendation plays a critical role in a patient's decision to get a seasonal flu vaccine. For example, pregnant women receiving a health care professional's recommendation and offer of vaccination were nearly 5 times more likely to get vaccinated (73.5%) than women not receiving a recommendation or offer (15.4%). While annual vaccination is recommended for nearly everyone 6 months and older, it is especially important for people who are at high risk of developing serious complications from flu, including children younger than 5 years, people 65 and older, pregnant women and anyone with a chronic medical condition.

We know that the effectiveness of flu vaccines can vary from season to season, but we also know there is significant evidence to support the benefits of vaccination each year. CDC influenza vaccine effectiveness studies show the 2012-2013 flu vaccine reduced the risk of flu-associated medical visits from influenza A (H3N2) viruses by one half and from influenza B by two-thirds for most of the population. This was true across age groups, with the exception of seniors. Our studies indicate that the vaccine did not work as well at protecting older adults against influenza A (H3N2) viruses. These findings highlight both the need for continued efforts to create better vaccines, but also the important benefits that can be captured by increasing influenza vaccination rates across all age groups with currently available vaccines. One CDC study concluded that flu vaccination prevented an estimated 13.6 million flu cases, 5.8 million medical visits and nearly 113,000 flu-related hospitalizations in the United States over a 6-year period (2005-2011). The more people we vaccinate, the more people we can help protect.

CDC encourages you and all other health providers to begin influenza vaccination of your patients as soon as vaccine is available in the community. As last season demonstrated, the timing of flu season can vary from one year to the next, so it is critical that patients be protected before significant influenza activity begins.

This season, there are more flu vaccine options than ever. With that in mind, it is increasingly important for both providers and patients to have access to the most up-to-date resources.

Vaccine information for the 2013-2014 flu season is available at

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/vaccine/vaccines.htm>. All providers are encouraged to review this information and be ready to answer questions and recommend the appropriate vaccine for your patients.

Please recommend that your patients get their influenza vaccine every year to help protect them against this serious and potentially deadly illness. Thank you for all you do and every year to help protect your patients and community against influenza.

Best regards,

Anne Schuchat, MD
Assistant Surgeon General, US Public Health Service
Director, National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention