

Influenza Update

December 8, 2008

National Influenza Vaccine Week

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has announced December 8-14, 2008 as National Influenza Vaccine Week. This event is designed to highlight the importance of continuing influenza vaccinations (1). The Southern Nevada Health District (SNHD) offers influenza shots as well as the inhaled FluMist at all of its centers. On Friday, December 12, 2008, SNHD will be offering free flu vaccines to all healthcare workers. Any form of identification is accepted (check stub, name tag, license, etc). SNHD office hours are Monday-Friday from 8 am-4:30 pm. Influenza immunizations are \$30. For additional information contact SNHD Immunizations, at 702-759-0850 or visit www.southernnevadahealthdistrict.org.

Current Situation

Currently, levels of influenza-like-illness (ILI), characterized by temperature of 100°F or greater and sore throat or cough, remain low in Clark County. The proportion of patient visits to sentinel providers during week 47 (ending Nov.22, 2008) for ILI was 1%. This is a slight increase from the start of influenza season (Week 40, ending Oct.2, 2008) when it was 0.9%. Nationally, influenza levels remain low with a national ILI of 1.3%, which is below the national baseline of 2.4% (2).

Children and the flu

Influenza is more dangerous than the common cold to children. Every year, influenza places a large burden on the health and well being of children and their families. Children often need medical care for influenza, especially if they are under the age of 5. Each year, 20,000 children under the age of five are hospitalized because of influenza complications. During the last influenza season, 86 children died from influenza complications. Severe influenza complications are most likely in children under 2 years old (3).

Children at Greatest Risk

Certain groups of children are at increased risk for flu complications. These groups include:

- *Children younger than 6 months old.* The flu vaccine is not approved for use in infants younger than 6 months old; however, the risk of influenza complications is higher in these young infants than it is for any other child age group. The best way to protect children younger than 6 months is to make

sure members of their household and their caregivers are vaccinated.

- *Children aged 6 months to 5 years.* Even children in this age group who are otherwise healthy are at risk simply because of their age. To protect their health all children 6 months and older should be vaccinated against the flu each year.
- *Children aged 6 months and older with chronic health problems including:* asthma or other problems of the lungs, immune suppression, chronic kidney disease, heart disease, HIV/AIDS, diabetes, sickle cell anemia, long-term aspirin therapy, and any condition that can reduce lung function (cognitive dysfunction, spinal cord injuries, seizure disorders, or other neuromuscular disorders)(3).

Vaccination Recommendations

CDC recommends that all children aged 6 months up to their 19th birthday get a flu vaccine. In addition, CDC also recommends that people in contact with certain groups of children get a flu vaccine in order to protect the child (or children) from exposure to the flu. The following are recommended for influenza vaccination by the CDC:

- Close contacts of children younger than 5 years old
- Out-of-home caregivers of children younger than 5 years old
- People who live with or have other close contact with a child or children of any age with a chronic health problem
- All healthcare workers

Children 6 months up to 9 years of age getting a flu vaccine for the first time will need 2 doses of vaccine the first year they are vaccinated. If possible the first dose should be given in September or as soon as the vaccine becomes available. The second dose should be given 28 or more days after the first dose. The first dose "primes" the immune system and the second dose provides immunity(3).

- (1) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Influenza Vaccine. Accessed at: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/NIVW/index.htm>
- (2) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Flu Activity and Surveillance. Accessed at: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly/fluactivity.htm>
- (3) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Children, the Flu, and the Flu Vaccine. Accessed at: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/children.htm>