

PUBLIC ISSUES

INFLUENZA VACCINE SHORTAGE

Oct. 6, 2004

1. Where can I go to get vaccinated?
The private sector may have already received some or all of their supply from another manufacturer. If you are in one of the priority groups, you should first contact your health care provider. If they do not have any vaccine, try www.findaflushot.com which can be searched by zip code. Be sure to call the clinic provider to make sure that the clinic is still being held.
2. What are the priority groups?
 - All children aged 6-23 months
 - Adults aged 65 years and older
 - Persons aged 2-64 years with underlying chronic medical conditions
 - All women who will be pregnant during the influenza season
 - Residents of nursing homes and long-term care facilities
 - Children aged 6 months-18 years on chronic aspirin therapy
 - Health-care workers involved in direct patient care
 - Out-of-home caregivers and household contacts of children aged <6 months.
3. What happened to the vaccine supply?
The US supply comes from two manufacturers (Aventis and Chiron), with about half from each company. One of the companies, Chiron, located in England, had its license to manufacture influenza vaccine suspended for three months.
4. Why can't more vaccine be made available by another manufacturer?
The FDA (Food and Drug Administration) approval process for all drugs is complex. Influenza vaccine requires tests for many things related safety and effectiveness. In addition, currently available influenza vaccines are produced by growing influenza viruses in embryonated chicken eggs taking between 6 to 9 months to prepare.
5. Why doesn't the US make its own vaccine?
Sorry, I don't have any information on that.
6. What about that new nasal vaccine?
 - FluMist is available in limited supply.
 - We encourage FluMist for those healthy adults under 50 years of age who are health-care workers involved in direct patient care provided they:

- are not pregnant
- do not care for severely immunocompromised patients in special care units
- do not care for children under 6 months of age
- refrain from contact with severely immunosuppressed patients for 7 days after vaccine receipt.

7. What about the use of antivirals?

It is too early in the flu season to know exactly which strains of flu will be occurring this year and whether antivirals will be effective. We will know more as the season progresses.

8. Meanwhile, what can I do to protect myself?

- Practice Universal Respiratory Precautions (URP):
 - Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing; promptly dispose of the tissue and wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm water (20 seconds)
 - If no tissue is available, cover your mouth and nose with hands; promptly wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm water
 - When soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers
 - Keep hands away from eyes, nose, and mouth
- Stay away from people who are sick; wear a surgical mask when caring for sick people
- Stay home when you are sick so as not to expose others

9. Where can I get more information?

www.cdc.gov/flu

IF ANYONE CALLS REPORTING PRICE GOUGING, ASK THEM TO CONTACT THE ATTORNEY GENERAL OFFICE AT 609-292-4925.