

Press Release

For Immediate Release
December 17, 2004

Contact: CDC Media Relations
404-639-3286

CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices Expands Priority Groups for Inactivated Influenza Vaccination

Adults aged 50-64 and close contacts of persons in high-risk groups will be eligible for influenza vaccination in areas where vaccine supply is sufficient to meet demand

Today, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) expanded the list of priority groups recommended to receive inactivated influenza vaccine this flu season, depending on the availability of influenza vaccine in state or local health jurisdictions.

Effective January 3rd, in locations where state and local health authorities judge vaccine supply to be adequate to meet demand, the priority groups for inactivated influenza vaccine will include adults age 50-64 and out-of-home caregivers and household contacts of persons in high-risk groups. People in the high-risk groups for serious complications from influenza include persons aged 65 years or older, children aged less than 2 years, pregnant women, and people of any age who have certain underlying health conditions such as heart or lung disease, transplant recipients, or persons with AIDS

"In most communities we're still targeting vaccine to the people in the highest priority groups," said Dr. Julie Gerberding Director of the CDC. "The challenge is that in some places, health departments and private providers currently do not have enough demand from people in those priority groups. We don't want those doses to go to waste, so some states are expanding to make good use of those doses. The ACIP's recommendation is consistent with this approach."

In response to this season's vaccine shortage, the ACIP previously recommended inactivated influenza vaccine for 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, and out-of-home caregivers and household contacts of children aged <6 months.

The ACIP suggested that health departments and health care providers implement the expanded recommendations on January 3, 2005, to provide more time for unvaccinated persons in current priority groups to seek vaccination. In addition, for those who need it, this date will also enable health officials to plan for expanded efforts to reach the new priority groups.

"Mid-season estimates of vaccination rates are below rates from last season for adults in priority groups. We urge persons in priority groups to continue to seek vaccination" said Dr. Gerberding. "If you're 65 or older or you have any kind of chronic condition or you're a health care worker who takes care of patients directly or if you're pregnant you really should get a flu shot this year and we're working hard to make sure it's available in your community."

The Committee also passed a resolution for the Vaccines for Children (VFC) program that expands the groups of eligible children to receive VFC influenza vaccine to include VFC-eligible children who are household contacts of persons in high-risk groups. This expansion of VFC is effective today. Influenza activity has been low so far this season. However, it is still early and the timing and level of influenza activity is unpredictable. The level of reported influenza activity can change at any time.

For more information about influenza and influenza vaccination visit www.cdc.gov/flu.