

Influenza 2008-2009: ACIP Recommendations

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Welcome to this CDC influenza podcast for health care professionals. In this podcast, Dr. Tony Fiore from CDC's Influenza Division discusses ACIP's vaccination recommendations for the 2008-2009 influenza season. For additional podcasts about influenza and other topics, go to www.cdc.gov/podcasts.

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, also known as the A-C-I-P, advises the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on vaccine issues. Each summer, the ACIP publishes guidance for the control and prevention of influenza for the upcoming influenza season.

This panel of experts voted in February 2008 to expand the recommended ages for annual influenza vaccination to include all healthy children and adolescents age 6 months through 18 years, that is, until their 19th birthday.

Providers and programs should already be routinely vaccinating the following: infants and children age 6 months up to their 5th birthday, children of any age who are close contacts of people at higher risk for influenza complications, and children who have chronic medical conditions that confer higher risk.

This season, if feasible, providers should also vaccinate *all* school-aged children – those age 5 through 18 years. If it's not feasible to routinely vaccinate these children this season, maybe because your practice is not yet set up to handle the large increase in vaccinations, then do the best you can, but begin preparing to put this recommendation into effect no later than the 2009-2010 influenza season.

This new recommendation increases the number of children recommended for vaccination by approximately 30 million. Overall, this latest expansion of the vaccination recommendations means that flu vaccine is now recommended for 261 million Americans; that's 86 percent of the U.S. population.

So why is the ACIP now recommending that we also vaccinate school-age children? Well, we have really learned a lot about influenza in the past several years. We have a growing understanding of the fact that influenza can be serious in children and places a large burden on children and families. Influenza illness rates are highest in school-aged children, and vaccinating them is the best way to prevent them from getting the flu and from having complications. About 10 percent of children in this age group have a chronic condition that puts them at higher risk for flu complications, such as asthma, diabetes, or a heart condition.

These children should be vaccinated each year. We also know that many *healthy*, school-age children should already be getting vaccinated because they live in the same household as people at higher risk for influenza complications, such as a grandparent, a sibling with asthma, or a young infant. The new recommendations simplify the vaccination guidance for children. Now, *every* child 6 months or older is recommended for vaccination. We hope this will help improve

vaccination rates among children who are at high risk of influenza and complications, or who should be vaccinated because they are in a household with others who are at high risk. We also hope it will help lower overall influenza morbidity rates in children.

It is very important that efforts to vaccinate children age 5 and younger continue, since these children are at higher risk for severe influenza illness and complications, compared to older children and adults.

It is especially important for people living with infants younger than 6 months old to get vaccinated, because these infants are too young to be vaccinated. The goal is to protect them by vaccinating those around them.

Finally, children younger than 9 years old, who are getting vaccinated for the first time, need to receive two doses of vaccine, given at least 4 weeks apart to get full protection. This is very important.

The ACIP continues to recommend vaccination of all children who have certain chronic medical conditions, such as asthma, diabetes, kidney disease, or weakened immune systems.

ACIP vaccination recommendations for adults have not changed. Vaccination is recommended for all adults age 50 and older. Any adults who want to be vaccinated, either to protect themselves or to reduce the chance of passing illness on to others, can and should be vaccinated. We estimate that for about 50 percent of adults younger than 50, there is a clear recommendation to get vaccinated. Some people younger than 50 may have a chronic medical condition that places them at high risk for influenza-related complications. Others may be health care workers who are in close contact with patients at higher risk for influenza-related complications. Other adults recommended for vaccination may live with a young child or a person with a chronic medical condition. Pregnant women and their families should also be vaccinated. Even if you are only worried about protecting yourself, there are many reasons to get vaccinated.

For more information on influenza, visit www.cdc.gov/flu.

For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.