



September 13, 2013

Dear Colleague:

Advice from a provider plays a critical role in a parent's decision to get his or her child vaccinated against seasonal influenza. The Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AIDD), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) ask for your help in urging your pediatric patients and clients with neurologic disorders and developmental disabilities to get vaccinated against influenza each year. Parents of such children who develop acute respiratory illness should be advised to consult a provider as soon as possible during influenza season, and providers are recommended to talk to parents about the importance of getting their child vaccinated each year against the flu.

The reason this is so important is that evidence shows that many children with neurologic or neurodevelopmental conditions are not being vaccinated against the flu. A recently published study in CDC's *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)*, "Influenza Vaccination Practices of Physicians and Caregivers of Children with Neurologic and Neurodevelopmental Conditions – United States, 2011 – 12 Influenza Season" found that a large percentage of children with neurologic and neurodevelopmental conditions did not receive and did not have appointments to receive a flu shot during influenza season.

The *MMWR* looked at parents and other caregivers' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors related to vaccination of children with neurologic and neurodevelopmental conditions against seasonal influenza. In addition, the researchers asked parents where they receive information about vaccines, like the flu shot.

- Among 1,005 parents of children with a neurologic and neurodevelopmental condition, about 50% said that their child had received or had an appointment to receive a flu shot.
- About 75% of caregivers said health care providers were their main source of information about vaccines, including the flu vaccine.

Researchers also sent an online survey to health care providers using the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) specialty email lists. Providers were asked about their

vaccine practices for different types of patients, and which chronic medical conditions were more likely to make someone severely ill from flu.

- Health providers who cared for children with neurologic and neurodevelopmental conditions regularly were familiar with cerebral palsy, epilepsy, stroke, spinal cord conditions, and other brain conditions as high-risk conditions for flu illness.
- In general, pediatricians did not recognize that intellectual disability is also a high-risk condition for flu.

AIDD and HRSA have joined with CDC in support of CDC's recommendations to protect children with neurologic disorders. These include:

- Annual influenza vaccination is recommended for everyone 6 months of age and older. This is especially important for people who are at high risk of developing serious complications, including young children, and anyone with chronic medical conditions (e.g. children with neurologic and neurodevelopmental disorders). Influenza vaccination is the best prevention method available.
- Annual influenza vaccination is also recommended for adults (caregivers, health care providers, and child care providers) who come in contact with children with neurologic disorders, including developmental disabilities.
- Prompt antiviral treatment for suspected influenza, even without testing, is recommended for children at high risk of influenza complications, including those with neurologic or neurodevelopmental disorders. Antiviral drugs are a second line of defense against influenza. Antiviral treatment of influenza is most effective when started within 48 hours of illness onset, but may still provide some clinical benefit when started later.

Please help get children vaccinated against influenza every year. And if a child shows influenza-like illness, please encourage parents of such children to bring the child in for assessment promptly so antiviral treatment can be started as soon as possible if needed. More information can be found at:

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/developmentaldisabilities/features/keyfinding-flu-vaccine-neurologic.html>

Sincerely,



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Director

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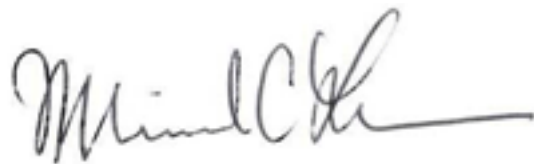


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