



September 19, 2012

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 prescribe antiviral medications immediately if influenza is suspected. Antiviral treatment works best if started shortly after influenza illness onset.

The reason this is so important is that evidence shows that children with neurologic conditions are at high risk for complications resulting from influenza illness. A recently published study in *Pediatrics*, "Neurologic Disorders among Pediatric Deaths Associated with the 2009 Pandemic Influenza," found that a large percentage of children dying from complications related to 2009 H1N1 virus infection had chronic neurologic disorders.

- The *Pediatrics* study looked at 2009 H1N1 influenza-related deaths in children based on data submitted to CDC from U.S. state and local health departments during the 2009 H1N1 pandemic.
 - Of the 336 children reported to have died from 2009 H1N1-associated complications, 227 (68%) had an underlying health condition.
 - Among those children, 64% had a neurologic disorder including developmental disabilities like cerebral palsy, intellectual disability, or epilepsy.
- Children with neurologic disorders tended to be older and remain hospitalized longer than children without underlying medical conditions who died of 2009 H1N1-related complications. These children also were more likely to die while hospitalized (80%) rather than in an emergency department or at home.
 - Children with neurologic disorders who died of 2009 H1N1-associated complications had a median age of 10 years, and the median time from symptom onset to death was 8 days.

- Of the children with neurologic conditions, only 3% were fully vaccinated against 2009 H1N1, the latter perhaps in part due to the timing of the availability of monovalent 2009 H1N1 vaccine.
- Focus groups with families indicated that when providers explained to parents how their child's specific health needs put them at greater risk for complications from influenza, the parents were more prone to have their child with special health vaccinated.

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

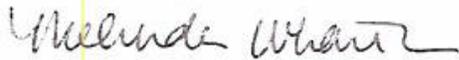
- Annual influenza vaccination is recommended for everyone 6 months of age and older. This is especially important for people who are at high risk of developing serious complications, including young children, and anyone with chronic medical conditions (e.g. children with neurologic and neuromuscular disorders). While influenza vaccine is never 100% effective, it 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 neuromuscular 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 symptoms, please encourage parents of such children to bring the child in for assessment promptly so antiviral treatment can be started as soon as possible. Our partners at the American Academy of Pediatrics, Families Fighting Flu, and Family Voices join us in supporting this urgent need. More information can be found at <http://www.cdc.gov/NCBDDD/features/flu-neurological-disorders.html>.

Sincerely,



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