

For Health Professionals

Health Alerts

Health Update #149 - Update on Influenza Vaccine Supply and Guidance on Prescribing Oseltamivir (Tamiflu®) - November 15, 2005

Summary

- To date, influenza disease activity has been low in New York State and in the United States this season.
- All four vaccine manufacturers are shipping vaccine. Vaccine is being shipped in partial orders from Sanofi Pasteur. Chiron Corp. is expected to produce 17-18 million doses, of which 8 million doses have already been distributed. GlaxoSmithKline has shipped all of its 7.5 million doses. MedImmune has been distributing the nasal-spray vaccine, FluMist®, in a timely manner.
- Based on the amount of influenza vaccine already produced and the projections for additional doses to become available in the next few weeks, it is apparent that there will not be a true vaccine shortage this season. There is, however, a delay in the availability of vaccine. Influenza vaccine will continue to be produced and distributed through December. Vaccine is being shipped by manufacturers and delivered by distributors as it becomes available.
- Providers may not have received vaccine yet, or may have received only a partial shipment. However, vaccine will continue to be distributed this fall and early winter.
- Providers and individuals seeking immunization against influenza will need patience, persistence and cooperation. Influenza does not usually peak until January or February, and so there is still time to immunize patients. Vaccination efforts should continue through December and possibly later until vaccine supplies have been exhausted.
- The New York State Department of Health discourages the private stockpiling of antiviral medications for use during a potential pandemic.

Influenza Disease Surveillance

The 2005-06 influenza vaccination season has just begun, and influenza activity has been low so far this season. The New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) conducts influenza surveillance from October through May each year and posts weekly surveillance activity reports on its web site at <http://www.health.state.ny.us/diseases/communicable/influenza/>. Since October 1, 2005, four cases of laboratory-confirmed influenza have been reported to the NYSDOH. Three of the cases were reported in residents of New York City and the fourth case was reported in a resident of Steuben County. All four cases were isolated cases occurring in the community. There have been no reports of facility or institutional outbreaks of influenza so far this season. In the U.S. as a whole, influenza disease activity has also been low. For the week ending October 29, 2005, 14 states reported sporadic influenza.

Influenza Vaccine Supply

According to data provided by the manufacturers, total influenza vaccine production in 2005 is expected to be 80-90 million doses. Last year's supply was only about 61 million doses, and much of that was unavailable until late in the influenza season. As of November 3, 2005, Sanofi Pasteur has distributed more than 51 million doses influenza vaccine with as much as 11 million more doses expected before the end of the year. GlaxoSmithKline (GSK), a new manufacturer to the U.S. market this year, has distributed all of its 7.5 million doses. Chiron recently announced that they would be producing approximately 17-18 million doses. By the first week of November, Chiron had distributed 8 million doses of vaccine and expects to produce another 8-9 million doses for delivery by early December.

Vaccine Distribution

There are several factors that are influencing vaccine distribution:

- All four manufacturers of influenza vaccine have had vaccine lots released for distribution by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), however all vaccine is not available at once, and each manufacturer is distributing vaccine on a different timetable.
- Sanofi Pasteur, the largest manufacturer of influenza vaccine, is planning to distribute more than 60 million doses. The vaccine is being distributed in several partial shipments. Sanofi Pasteur expects to complete its shipping of vaccine by the end of the year.
- GSK's vaccine is being supplied through distributors. This provides an additional step for the distribution of vaccine. GSK has shipped all of its 7.5 million doses.
- Chiron distributes all of its influenza vaccine through 7 distributors, some of which may have secondary distributors. Since Chiron is producing fewer doses than originally projected, deliveries to distributors will be scaled back. Chiron will ship available vaccine to their distributors in a pro-rated amount based on their original order.
- MedImmune has been distributing the nasal-spray vaccine, FluMist®, in a timely manner.

Though all manufacturers have been shipping vaccine, not all influenza vaccine becomes available at once. This fact, plus the shipping delay of Chiron's vaccine, means that many providers have not yet received vaccine. Typically, once a lot is released by the FDA, the manufacturer completes its internal lot release protocol and begins shipping vaccine from that lot to distributors or end users in 1 to 2 weeks. A physician may not know exactly which type of vaccine he or she will be receiving and whether the supply is delayed or not. For the latest information on lot releases, please see the FDA website at <http://www.fda.gov/cber/flu/flu2005.htm>.

The NYSDOH has obtained a modest supply of influenza vaccine that the Department is making available to local health departments to use in their own clinics or to redistribute as they deem appropriate. The NYSDOH will continue to ship vaccine as it becomes available. Patience, persistence, and cooperation are needed as vaccination efforts continue.

Use of Vaccine by Mass Immunizers

Many physicians are concerned that clinics operated by drug stores, supermarkets and other retail stores seem to have vaccine when they do not. These clinics are run by large, national corporations who buy millions of doses of vaccine for this purpose. Although there may have been some imbalance in the delivery of vaccines to these entities early in the season, they are now feeling the pinch, as providers have. Maxim Health, the largest of the corporations that operates retail store-based flu clinics in New York, is concluding its scheduled walk-in clinics, possibly resulting in more individuals seeking vaccination at their provider's office or local health department.

Timing of Vaccination

At the beginning of the 2005-06 influenza vaccination season, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) had urged health care providers to limit community-wide flu vaccination campaigns through October 24 to individuals in high-risk groups, such as people over the age of 65 and those with certain underlying medical conditions. As that date has now passed, vaccination is now open to anyone wishing to be protected against influenza. If providers are aware of persons in high-risk categories who still have not been immunized, they should make efforts to recall and vaccinate them when vaccine supplies become available. Providers with limited vaccine supplies may choose to continue to limit influenza vaccination to persons in high risk groups. However, ample time remains to receive and administer influenza vaccine. The 2005-06 influenza season has just begun, disease activity is low, and influenza disease usually does not peak in the U.S. until January, February, or later. Therefore, vaccination can continue into December and beyond and still provide a great deal of protection against influenza disease.

Purchasing Vaccine

Due to the fact that manufacturers and distributors have taken orders for virtually all their vaccine, it is difficult for providers to place an order for influenza vaccine if they have not already done so. However, Sanofi Pasteur has indicated that it still has pediatric doses of preservative-free influenza vaccine available for purchase. The vaccine comes in a pediatric dose of .25 ml in a prefilled syringe and is licensed for children age 6 months to 3 years of age. Two doses of the 0.25 ml syringes can be used to vaccinate an individual over the age of 3. In addition, FluMist® is available for purchase. FluMist® can be used for healthy persons 5-49 years of age, including healthcare workers (except those workers in protective settings such as bone marrow transplant units) and household contacts of high-risk individuals. The NYSDOH/SOFA website posts information about any vaccine distributor who may still be taking orders. That website may be found at www.flu.state.ny.us.

Avian Influenza and the Use of Antiviral Medication

Recent news reports have focused on outbreaks of avian influenza (H5N1) among wild birds and domestic poultry throughout many countries in Southeast Asia and some countries in Europe. In addition, there have been a limited number of sporadic human cases and deaths in Southeast Asian countries. There has been no H5N1 avian influenza detected in birds, poultry, or humans in North America. Thus, the NYSDOH recommends the following:

- Healthcare providers are strongly discouraged from prescribing oseltamivir (Tamiflu®) or other antiviral medications for private stockpiling.
- The public is strongly discouraged from requesting antiviral supplies for private stockpiling.
- Due to limited supplies of oseltamivir in the U.S., hoarding of this drug now because of concerns about a future pandemic may mean that oseltamivir will not be available for those who need it most during the current influenza season.
- The current priority for the use of oseltamivir and other antiviral medications is for the treatment and prophylaxis of those people who are at the highest risk for serious complications from influenza infection during the upcoming regular influenza season.
- The indiscriminate and inappropriate use of oseltamivir may promote the development and spread of resistance of this important drug among influenza viruses.

Additional information on avian influenza can be found at the website of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov/flu/avian) or at the website of the World Health Organization (www.who.org).

Guidance on the use of antiviral medications for treating and preventing influenza disease can be obtained from the following article printed in the MMWR, Prevention and Control of Influenza, Recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP):
<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5408a1.htm>.

For additional questions on avian influenza or influenza in general, please call the Erie County Department of Health at 716-858-7697 or the New York State Department of Health Immunization Program at 518-473-4437.