

Health Alerts

Health Advisory #159 - Availability of Flu Vaccine as outlined by Dr. Novello's Letter to Physicians - January 20, 2006

The following information was provided in Commissioner Novello's January 17th letter to physicians in New York State (Specific information pertaining to Erie County is detailed in section 2.):

New York is starting to see an increase in various influenza surveillance measures that indicate the start of the yearly influenza season. However, influenza vaccine supplies are still available and it is not too late to vaccinate your patients. Some physicians have yet to obtain an adequate supply of influenza vaccine this season. Hopefully the following information will be helpful to you.

1. Influenza disease update. The national influenza picture, available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly/>) shows widespread activity in the U.S. Southwest. In New York, the State Health Department conducts influenza surveillance from October through May each year and posts weekly surveillance activity reports on its website: <http://www.health.state.ny.us/diseases/communicable/influenza/surveillance.htm>. Currently, New York is showing only sporadic activity based on limited reports of laboratory confirmed influenza and flu outbreaks. However, reports of influenza-like-illness from sentinel physician practices have shown an increase above the baseline threshold in recent weeks, which may be an indication that the flu season is getting underway. Typically, the influenza season in New York often does not peak until January or February, and cases often continue into March and April. Thus, vaccination can continue this season through January, and later, and still provide protection against influenza disease.

2. Influenza vaccine is still available. According to CDC, the total amount of vaccine expected to be available in the United States this season is approximately 80 million doses. This is enough, if fully utilized, to meet consumer demand, which in the past has usually been around 70-75 million doses per year. However, because influenza vaccine distribution and administration occurs primarily in the private sector and is not centrally managed by CDC or health departments, the availability of influenza vaccine has varied from place to place. The information from CDC is that vaccine lots are still being made available by some manufacturers as follows:

- Chiron Corporation influenza vaccine was released up to the end of December and may be available for purchase from F.F.F. Enterprises, a large vaccine wholesaler (800-843-7477).
- The Erie County Department of Health has a limited supply of Influenza Vaccine 2005-2006 (both adult and pediatric formulas are available). This vaccine is being offered to community healthcare providers for administration to their patients and staff. This vaccine has been provided at no charge by the New York State Department of Health; therefore you may not charge patients or insurance carriers for the cost of the vaccine (An administration fee may be charged).

Please contact Leon Nadler, Medical Care Administrator at (716) 858-6998 during regular business hours (Monday - Friday; 8:30 AM - 4:30 PM) if you are interested in obtaining Flu vaccine. This supply will be distributed on a first-come-first-served basis so please respond accordingly.

3. Influenza vaccination purchase for next year. This is the time of year when vaccine manufacturers and distributors start to take orders for next year. Sanofi Pasteur, the largest manufacturer of influenza vaccine in the U.S. recently announced that they will begin prebooking their inactivated influenza vaccine, Fluzone™, for the 2006-07 influenza season as of noon on January 31, 2006. As you may recall from the current season, Sanofi Pasteur prebooked the entire Fluzone supply in less than two days last year. Sanofi Pasteur representatives have informed us that this booking of Fluzone™ will be on a "first come, first serve" basis; thus providers should reserve their doses as early as possible. Physicians who wish to prebook an influenza vaccine order with Sanofi Pasteur, and who do not have an existing account with that manufacturer, should contact Sanofi prior to the ordering date to establish an account. Other manufacturers and distributors will likely begin taking orders in the next few months as well.

Thank you for your patience during this influenza season and for your continued willingness to provide the essential service of influenza vaccination to your patients. It is not too late to vaccinate patients this year to prevent influenza. We also urge you to begin preparations for the 2006-07 influenza season.