

Vaccination Updates and Recommendation for the 2016-2017 Flu Season

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The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends that everyone aged 6 months and older receive an influenza vaccine during the 2016-2017 flu season. In the 2014-2015 flu season, only 44.3 percent of people eligible for the flu vaccine in Michigan received it, with the following breakdown by age: 52.6 percent of children aged 6 months through 17 years, 35.7 percent of people aged 18 through 64 years, and 65.7 percent of people aged 65 years and older. Overall, flu vaccination rates in Michigan have been slowly trending upward for the past four influenza seasons but are still low in comparison to other states. It is important for all people aged 6 months and older to receive the flu vaccine, as it is the single best way to prevent influenza.

At their June meeting, the ACIP voted that live attenuated influenza vaccine (LAIV), also known as the nasal spray flu vaccine FluMist[®], should not be used during the 2016-2017 flu season. ACIP still recommends that everyone aged 6 months and older receive an annual flu vaccine. This change to the recommendation should not discourage people from getting flu vaccine.

New research supported changing this recommendation. Data presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) showed that overall vaccine effectiveness for LAIV was 3 percent for children aged 2 through 17 years, whereas the inactivated influenza vaccine (IIV) was 63 percent effective. It is still unclear why LAIV was not as effective in preventing flu during the 2015-2016 flu season, however officials will continue to research LAIV, as they do with all vaccines to ensure vaccine safety and effectiveness. This situation is an example of scientific research influencing new policies that improve public health responses and overall population health. Flu vaccines are monitored on an ongoing basis, and health officials are continually working to improve the effectiveness of these vaccines.

The influenza virus spreads easily from person to person, and causes more cases annually in the United States than any other vaccine-preventable disease. The annual flu vaccine provides the best protection against the flu and its complications. There are specific groups of people who should make sure to receive the flu vaccine because they are at greater risk for flu-related complications. This includes: pregnant women, persons with certain medical conditions (e.g. asthma, diabetes), adults 65 years of age and older, residents of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities, American Indians/Alaskan Natives, and children under the age of 5 years. People who are not part of a high-risk population should still get vaccinated to protect themselves and help protect others from the flu. Making flu vaccination a priority will ensure everyone is protected and will aid in decreasing flu and its complications, including hospitalizations and deaths. If you have questions, please contact Stefanie Cole, RN, MPH, Immunization Nurse Educator at ColeS4@michigan.gov.