

August 4, 2009

Pandemic Influenza Vaccination Update

The best plan for mitigating the impact of an influenza pandemic is the timely administration of vaccine. For the 2009-10 influenza season, two different types of influenza vaccine are expected to be recommended for persons in the United States - seasonal influenza vaccine and a separate vaccine solely for protection from the novel H1N1 pandemic virus that emerged in the spring of 2009.

Seasonal influenza vaccine distribution and administration is expected to occur similarly to past years. The importance of seasonal flu vaccination is undiminished by the emergence of the pandemic virus; seasonal viruses are co-circulating with the pandemic virus, and will cause serious illness and death this season, as in past years. The most important step for seasonal influenza vaccine providers this fall is to use the vaccine when it arrives, which is expected to be as early as August 2009. The vaccine supply is expected to be comparable to last season at approximately 118 million doses.

Five vaccine manufacturers (i.e., sanofi pasteur, Novartis, GlaxoSmithKline, MedImmune, and CSL) have been contracted to produce pandemic influenza vaccine for this fall, in both inactivated injectable and live attenuated nasal spray forms. The federal government plans to purchase and ship the vaccine to states based on a pro rata population allocation. The plan is for manufacturers to eventually produce enough vaccine to fulfill the national demand, although initial shipments will be targeted to specific at-risk groups. An administration fee will be allowed under some circumstances and it is likely that many insurance plans will cover the administration fee.

Much about the vaccine is still unknown. The quantities that will be initially available are thought to be about 40 million, 80 million, or 160 million for the first shipment, which is anticipated to be available as early as mid-October. Subsequent weekly shipments of amounts ranging from 10-30 million are expected following the initial shipment. McKesson Pharmaceuticals, CDC's national distributor, will direct ship the vaccine in minimum quantities of 100 doses to approximately 90,000 providers nationwide. It is not yet known how many direct-ship sites can be designated for Ohio. Details of administration will be determined following the clinical trials, however it is assumed that 2 doses will be needed and that a minimum spacing of 21-days between doses will be indicated. Information from vaccine manufacturers indicates that some formulations will use adjuvants, some of which will need to be mixed at the time of administration.

It is certain that vaccinating Ohioans with the pandemic influenza vaccine will be a massive undertaking that will require the active participation of a wide range of immunization providers in many venues. Local health districts will be responsible for assurance that their population is offered the vaccine, but the large scope of the vaccination efforts creates a need for partnership with many health-care providers. These providers could include pediatricians, family physicians, community health centers, hospitals, and retail vaccinators. At this point, the federal government plans for state public health departments to authorize immunizers and direct the shipments of all pandemic vaccine.

The Ohio Department of Health continues to plan for responding to this influenza pandemic and will forward more updates as they are available.