September 12, 2013

TO: Members, AAP Section on Infectious Diseases

FROM: Michael Brady, MD, FAAP, Committee on Infectious Diseases
Steven E. Krug, MD, FAAP, Disaster Preparedness Advisory Council

RE: INFLUENZA: PROTECTING CHILDREN AT HIGHEST RISK

During National Preparedness Month (September), the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) collaborates with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and other groups to emphasize the importance of influenza vaccination and treatment in children at highest risk. See [www.aap.org/disasters/preparednessmonth](http://www.aap.org/disasters/preparednessmonth) and [www.aapredbook.org/flu](http://www.aapredbook.org/flu).

As we did last year, we ask for your help in ensuring that all children > 6 months of age receive the influenza vaccine. Because there are many children who have medical conditions that place them at greater risk for severe disease due to influenza, it is very important that immunizing these more vulnerable children and their close contacts is a priority and occurs as soon as influenza vaccine is available. It is also appropriate to use antiviral therapies early and aggressively in these vulnerable children to lessen the impact of influenza infection. As you know, the children that are most vulnerable are those with chronic medical conditions such as asthma, diabetes mellitus, hemodynamically significant cardiac disease, immunosuppression, or neurologic and neurodevelopmental disorders. Children younger than 2 years are also at risk.

Below are actions you can take to help protect children at highest risk:

Review Recent Findings and Articles

*MMWR article: “Influenza Vaccination Practices of Physicians and Caregivers of Children with Neurologic and Neurodevelopmental Conditions — United States, 2011–12 Influenza Season”.*

- Key Findings

- Full Article
  [http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6236a3.htm?s_cid=mm6236a3_w](http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6236a3.htm?s_cid=mm6236a3_w)

*AAP News article: “Children with Special Health Care Needs Especially Vulnerable to Flu”, see [http://aapnews.aappublications.org/content/34/9/1.1.full](http://aapnews.aappublications.org/content/34/9/1.1.full).*

Participate in the AAP/CDC Clinician Outreach and Communication Activity Call

Tuesday, September 24, 2013, at 2:00pm ET: Call: 888-233-9077, passcode: 3873879

Title: Protecting Children at Highest Risk for Influenza Complications

Speakers: Renee M Turchi, MD, MPH, FAAP; Henry H. Bernstein, DO, MHCM, FAAP; Seema Jain, MD; and Georgina Peacock, MD, MPH, FAAP

Get Vaccinated – Urge Others to Do the Same!
Health care personnel should get the influenza vaccination every year so they do not get sick with influenza or give influenza to their patients. As health care professionals, we fail to lead by example if we urge others to be vaccinated for seasonal influenza but do not require it of ourselves. In the 2011-12 influenza season, only 66.9% of health care personnel reported influenza vaccination. The national Healthy People 2020 objective is 90%, so clearly, more effort is needed.

Make Sure Children at Highest Risk get Vaccinated
Because you might see children at risk more often during the influenza season than the primary care provider, we ask that you talk to parents about the importance of influenza immunization and advise them to take their child to get vaccinated as soon as vaccine is available. Also, talk about the importance of “cocooning” or immunizing family members and child care providers who spend time with children who are at risk or who cannot get vaccinated. Immunization of close contacts of children at high risk is intended to reduce their risk of contagion. Cocooning is especially important to protect infants younger than 6 months, because they are too young to be immunized with influenza vaccine.

Promote Early and Aggressive Treatment for ILI
It is crucial for children with at high risk to get antiviral medications when they begin to show signs of ILI. Talk to the parents of these patients before the flu begins to circulate and urge them to call you or the primary care provider right away if the child is ill. Using a tracking mechanism or registry to flag children with certain conditions might be useful.

Model Strategies or Success Stories
The AAP will compile model strategies or stories that illustrate why these approaches are important. Please e-mail DisasterReady@aap.org with your ideas or stories!

If you have questions about the AAP disaster preparedness and response initiatives, please contact Laura Aird, MS, Manager, Disaster Preparedness and Response (laird@aap.org or 847-434-7132) or Sean Diederich, Program Coordinator (sdiederich@aap.org or 847-434-7125).

Thank you for your assistance in spreading the word!