

September 22, 2005

**MESSAGE FROM THE UNDER SECRETARY FOR HEALTH**

**VA Influenza Vaccine Advisory #2  
2005-2006**

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**1. New Points Made in the VHA Influenza Vaccine Directive for 2005-2006**

The VHA Directive, *Influenza Vaccine Recommendations for 2005-2006*, will be released shortly. New points made this year include the following:

**a. Provide Vaccine Information Statements (VISs); influenza vaccines are now part of the National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program (VICP).** The VICP requires that a copy of the relevant current edition of vaccine information materials (called Vaccine Information Statements or VISs) must be given to the recipient prior to administration of each dose—and documented. Interim versions of VISs for both approved formulations of influenza vaccine (injected and intranasal) have been written by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and are available from the CDC web site or in the 2005-2006 VA Flu Vaccine Toolkit (see Web sites listing at the end of this document). These interim VISs may be updated during this flu season; if so, new versions will be posted on these Web sites. VA health care facilities may supplement VISs with visual presentations or oral explanations, as appropriate.

**b. Report percentages of employees vaccinated.** It is essential that VA staff be vaccinated to protect themselves, their patients and the VA health care system as a whole from unnecessary illness, death, and lost work time from influenza. Knowing how many staff members are likely to be vaccinated by VA helps greatly in our planning for influenza prevention. However, at present we do not have a central, electronic record-keeping system for all employees and therefore no mechanism to either record or analyze influenza vaccination of employees. We recognize that this request may be burdensome for some sites and are striving to keep the request as simple as possible. Therefore, please plan to provide the total number of vaccine doses given to employees, along with denominator information on the total number of employees at your site.

**c. Document administration of flu vaccine to veteran patients in the computerized patient record system (CPRS).** This allows VA to quantify use of vaccine by patients within its health care system and project future supply needs.

**d. Adhere to these periodic VA Influenza Vaccine Advisories.** These advisories serve to inform VA clinicians on how to interpret and implement CDC guidelines for VA health care sites.

**e. Use live, attenuated influenza vaccine (intranasal flu vaccine—called LAIV or FluMist™) when appropriate.** LAIV may be used as an alternative to inactivated (injected) influenza vaccine for certain persons— LAIV is approved for only for healthy persons aged 5-49 years who are not contacts of severely immunosuppressed persons. Follow the package insert and/or CDC's advice found on its web site (see Web sites listing at the end of this document). Facilities or VISNs may make individual decisions about purchase and use of LAIV.

**f. Include a newly added target group for vaccination.** CDC added the following group to the list of persons at increased risk for complications from influenza: persons who have any condition that can compromise respiratory function or the handling of their respiratory secretions or that can increase the risk for aspiration (for example, persons with cognitive dysfunction, spinal cord injuries, seizure disorders, or other neuromuscular disorders).

## **2. How CDC's New Tiered Timing Recommendations Apply to VA**

CDC has announced a tiered timing approach for administration of inactivated (injected) flu vaccine this year. This approach puts "first in line" people who are most at risk for complications of influenza or those who care for them (CDC Tiers 1A-C). VA will follow CDC's guidelines, **with one change.** Where CDC recommends "health care personnel who provide direct patient care" to be high priority, VA is changing this to "personnel who work in VA health care facilities." Therefore, until October 24, 2005, VA health care facilities should provide inactivated (injected) flu vaccine to these individuals only:

- Veteran patients 65 years or older enrolled for VA health care
- Veteran patients of any age with comorbid conditions (pulmonary, cardiac, chronic metabolic, immunosuppression, compromised respiratory function--see VA Influenza directive or [www.cdc.gov/flu/](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/) for a detailed list) enrolled for VA health care
- Residents of VA's long-term-care facilities; veterans housed in group or shelter situations
- Pregnant women veterans enrolled for VA health care
- Personnel who work in VA health care facilities
- Household contacts and out-of-home caregivers of children aged <6 months

After October 24, 2005, any members of the VA community (enrolled veterans or staff) may be vaccinated as supplies allow. Note that this Tiered Timing approach only applies to inactivated (injected) influenza vaccine.

### **3. Goals for VA's 2005-2006 Season:**

Our goals for VA's influenza vaccination program for 2005-2006 are:

- Increasing the rate of influenza vaccination of health care workers and all personnel at VA health care sites
- Maintaining or increasing our excellent rate of influenza vaccination of veteran patients
- Providing vaccination against pneumococcal illness where indicated.
- Promoting nonvaccine methods of preventing infection, particularly through hand and respiratory hygiene.
- Involving all staff and providers in promoting influenza vaccination

### **4. Status of VA Flu Toolkits**

VA Influenza Toolkits containing posters, stickers, buttons, and printed copies of the 2005-2006 VA Influenza Toolkit Manual should arrive at VA facilities in mid- to late-September. Toolkits were shipped to the following list of key contacts at each site: influenza (flu) coordinators, occupational health professionals, infection control professionals, patient safety officers, Employee Education System (EES) education contacts, prevention coordinators, patient educators, and public affairs officers.

### **5. When to Expect Your Vaccine Supply**

The Pharmacy Benefits Management Strategic Health Group expects that 20 percent of ordered supplies will be delivered by the end of September. The remainder will be delivered in 3 to 4 shipments by the end of November.

### **6. VA-Purchased Vaccine is Only for Enrolled Veterans and VA Staff**

VA facilities may use the influenza vaccine ordered via VA contract V797P-9170 only for enrolled veterans and VA staff. If your site is caring for non-enrolled veterans or others displaced by hurricanes, consult your Pharmacy Chief or Pharmacy Benefits Manager or Emergency Management Strategic Healthcare Group contact (VA Intranet: <http://vaww1.va.gov/EMSHG/page.cfm?pg=65> ) for guidance on how to obtain additional vaccine through the Federal government's National Response Plan.

**Thank you for your work and coordination in implementing your influenza vaccine programs and for taking seriously the threat that influenza poses to our veterans, our employees, and the VA medical system.**

Jonathan B. Perlin, MD, PhD, MSHA, FACP

**Questions may be directed to:**

- **Clinical issues:** Gary Roselle, MD, or Linda Danko, RN, MSN — Infectious Disease Program Office or Lawrence Deyton, MSPH, MD, or Victoria Davey, RN, MPH — Public Health Strategic Healthcare Group
- **Policy issues:** Odette Levesque, RN — Office of the Deputy Under Secretary for Health Operations or Lawrence Deyton, MSPH, MD, or Victoria Davey, RN, MPH — Public Health Strategic Healthcare Group
- **Vaccine Supply Issues:** Virginia Torrise, PharmD or Joe Canzolino, RPh — Pharmacy Benefits Management Strategic Health Group
- **Occupational Health Issues:** Michael Hodgson, MD, MPH, Pamela Hirsch, NP, or Steve Sloane — Occupational Health Program
- **Public Affairs:** Everett Chasen, Chief Communications Officer, VHA, or Connie Raab — Public Health Strategic Health Care Group

**Web sites**

- VA Directive: *Influenza Vaccine Recommendations for 2005-2006* will be posted on the VHA Documents Home Page <http://www1.va.gov/vhapublications/>
- VA Influenza Vaccine Advisories, the 2005-2005 VA Flu Toolkit manual, and other information on flu are posted at <http://www.publichealth.va.gov/flu/>
- Flu-related posters and other handwashing and respiratory hygiene materials are posted at <http://www.publichealth.va.gov/InfectionDontPassItOn/>
- CDC influenza information is posted at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/>
- Vaccine Information Statements (VISs) are posted at: <http://www.cdc.gov/nip/publications/VIS/default.htm#flu>
- CDC's LAIV information may be found at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/qa/nasalspray.htm>