



Press Release

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Contact: CDC Media Relations
404-639-3286

CDC Influenza Expert Selected as Federal Employee of the Year

Growing up in a tiny town in rural Iowa, Nancy Cox dreamed of finding a way to combine her love of science with adventures traveling the world. By age 9 or 10, she hoped to become a doctor in Africa or Asia. Later, it was dreams of working for the World Health Organization. But little did she dream that within a few decades she would be the lead influenza expert at the nation's top public health agency and the Partnership for Public Service's choice to be honored as federal Employee of the Year.

Dr. Cox, who serves as chief of Influenza Division at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), will be honored Sept. 27 in Washington, DC, for her work to help the United States and the world prepare for a potential influenza pandemic. Dr. Cox was selected to receive the top honor from the Partnership's nine finalists for the Service to America Medals. The Partnership is a nongovernmental organization that works to make the government an employer of choice for talented, dedicated Americans.

"As a child, I never dreamed I'd have the opportunities I've had while working at CDC," Dr. Cox said. "I'm very honored to receive this award. I feel like it's a reflection of the excellent work done by many, many people who've worked on influenza at CDC – both in the past and present – and have helped build our influenza program into what it is today."

Since 2002, the Partnership for Public Service has presented Service to America Medals to federal employees who have made significant contributions. Winners are chosen based on their commitment and innovation, as well as the impact of their work in addressing the needs of the nation.

"Nancy Cox embodies the best of what CDC is about - world-class scientists serving on the front lines each and every day to protect America's health. Her dedication and leadership of CDC's influenza activities are truly making a difference in the country's fight against seasonal influenza as well as in the world's preparation for the next influenza pandemic," said CDC Director Dr. Julie L. Gerberding.

Dr. Cox, 58, and the other 17 students in her high school graduating class had no guidance counselors to help them apply to college. She applied on her own and was accepted at Iowa

State University. After graduation, spurred by an early independent streak and her desire to see the world, she applied to and completed graduate school at Darwin College at the University of Cambridge in England. While abroad, she developed a passion for influenza research, partly because of influenza's global impact and scope and partly because of the challenges associated with working on a virus that is constantly changing.

After graduate school, Dr. Cox first worked as a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. She joined CDC in 1975, intending to stay for a couple years before moving back to academia. But she found a love and respect for public health and a fascination with influenza that has kept her at CDC for more than 30 years.

“One of the things that is very attractive about my work at CDC is that when I get up in the morning, I feel that I’m going to a job that’s important because our work benefits not only the American public but also the world in general,” Dr. Cox said.

Starting with a staff of only 14 people when she took over the influenza group in 1992, Dr. Cox has worked diligently to increase the CDC’s influenza staff and abilities to fight the disease. Today, she manages a staff of more than 100. Her team is at the forefront of the government’s effort to track and study influenza viruses domestically and to help the world prepare for the next pandemic. The Influenza Division monitors for new flu strains or unusual outbreaks that could signal a pandemic, supports countries worldwide in outbreak investigations, provides recommendations on selection of strains for the annual flu vaccine and performs a variety of research to explore genetic changes in influenza viruses that may lead to a pandemic and how the viruses spread and cause disease.

Dr. Cox received a bachelor’s degree in bacteriology from Iowa State University in 1970. She was one of about 30 American students awarded a Marshall Scholarship to study in England at the University of Cambridge, where in 1975 she earned a doctoral degree in virology with a dissertation that focused on influenza virus/host interactions.

The recipient of numerous scientific and achievement awards, Dr. Cox is a member of the editorial board for the journal *Lancet Infectious Diseases*. She is also a founding member of the International Society for Influenza and other Respiratory Diseases and is the author and co-author of more than 175 research articles, reviews and book chapters. For her leadership in preparing the United States and the international community for a potential influenza pandemic, Dr. Cox was also recognized in 2006 by *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines. *Time* magazine named her one of 2006’s 100 Most Influential People of the Year and *Newsweek* magazine honored her as one of the “15 People who Make America Great.”

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