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NEW GUIDELINES SUGGEST FLU SHOTS FOR ALL CHILDREN
VACCINATE NOW FOR BEST PROTECTION

(RICHMOND, Va.)— The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) urges parents to vaccinate children between the ages of six months and 18 years against influenza. The new recommendations reflect guidance this year from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that adds children between 5 and 18 years old to last years' recommendations to vaccinate younger children, 6 months through 4 years of age.

“The expanded recommendations to vaccinate children 5 years old and up include 1.3 million school-age children in Virginia,” said State Health Commissioner, Karen Remley, M.D., M.B.A., F.A.A.P. “While these older children seldom get as sick as infants and toddlers, this population catches the flu at higher rates, so protection through vaccination should result in fewer missed days from school and less time away from work for parents.” Vaccination of school aged children can also help protect their families and the community. Children easily and readily spread influenza. Several recent studies have show that communities with more young children tend to have earlier and increased levels of respiratory illness compared to areas that have fewer youngsters.

In addition to young children, annual vaccination is also recommended for pregnant women, individuals aged 50 and over, anyone with certain chronic health conditions, and close contacts of high risk groups. “While they are visiting their healthcare provider for prenatal check-ups, pregnant women should definitely consider getting vaccinated,” said Dr. Remley. Recent studies have shown that vaccination during pregnancy not only helps protect the pregnant mother from influenza, but also conveys immunity to the infant that may last through the first six months of life.

(more)

Influenza is a highly contagious virus that is spread easily from person to person, primarily when an infected individual coughs or sneezes. The virus can be transmitted 24 to 48 hours before influenza symptoms appear and up to 5 days after an infected person becomes sick. **That means that you may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick.** Every year in the United States, on average 5% to 20% of the population gets the flu; more than 200,000 people are hospitalized from flu complications, and; approximately 36,000 people die from flu. Combined with pneumonia, influenza is the seventh leading cause of death in the nation.

“The single best way to protect against the flu is to get vaccinated each year,” stressed Jim Farrell, director of the VDH Division of Immunization. “The best time to receive influenza vaccine is during October and November; however vaccination in December, or even later, can still prevent the flu.” January and February are typically peak flu months in Virginia, but increased flu activity can last into March. Protection develops about two weeks after vaccination and may last up to a year.

In addition to getting a flu shot each year, good health habits can help prevent influenza. These include coughing into your sleeve or covering your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing; washing your hands often to help protect yourself from germs; avoiding touching your eyes, nose or mouth; staying home from work, school, and errands when you are sick; and avoiding close contact with people who are sick.

For additional information in influenza and a complete list of populations recommended to receive the flu shot visit <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/epidemiology/immunization/>

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