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The Houston

Newsletter of the
Immunization Bureau,
Houston Department of
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VAXScene

“Enthusiasm is infectious”

Linking Immunization Registries: a Winning Combination

Hurricane Katrina brought devastation to the Gulf Coast states including the loss of not only homes and possessions but also personal documents such as immunization records of children.

Still, in the midst of the destruction, one important piece of information is safe and dry: the immunization history of affected children. Thanks to statewide immunization registries, a large percentage of records from Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama are protected and accessible. The registries from these states contain among the highest levels of childhood immunization data in the country.

In an unprecedented effort, the Houston-Harris County Immunization Registry within a few days of Katrina's strike established an electronic link with the Louisiana Immunization Network for Kids Statewide (LINKS), that state's registry. Nurses, managers, clerks and data entry operators with the Immunization Bureau at the Houston Department of Health and Human Services (HDHHS) worked out of shelters across the city, including the George R. Brown Convention Center (GRB), to support relief efforts, assess and retrieve immunization information and administer immunizations to hurricane evacuees. HDHHS administered almost 4,400 doses of vaccines to evacuated



Rachel Rodríguez, senior data entry operator and Jarred Roberts, customer service clerk, assist the parents of hundreds of displaced children by locating immunization histories at the George R. Brown Convention Center following Hurricane Katrina.

children and more than 8,800 doses to adults. In a period of just two weeks, HDHHS staff members administered 5,990 doses at the GRB alone.

The Immunization Registry Support Branch at the Center for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that more than 13,000 queries have been made to LINKS. LINKS remained functional because a backup system, located in Baton Rouge, had been operational since Katrina struck.

Reports received by CDC suggest that

thousands of young evacuees throughout the United States have benefited from LINKS by gaining access to their immunization records electronically. Although special provisions enabled students to enter new schools without proof of immunizations, an immunization record provides extra assurance that no delays will occur and no shots will be administered unnecessarily. CDC estimates that 83 percent of the immunization history queries made to LINKS are from Texas, particularly from the Houston area.

For information on the benefits and features of the local registry or to become a participating medical provider, contact Maureen Moore, registry coordinator, at 713-794-9262 or e-mail questions to info@hhcir.org.

Clinician Notes

Houston's immunization coverage levels drop

Houston's immunization coverage rates for children 19 to 35 months remain low at 65 percent for the 4:3:1:3:3 series (4 DTaP, 3 Polio, 1 MMR, 65 HIB and 3 Hepatitis B), according to the most recent National Immunization Survey (NIS). CDC estimates the Houston and Harris County currently have more than 90,000 children less than 5 years of age who are susceptible to vaccine preventable diseases.

The NIS is a national survey designed to assess immunization rates in preschool-age children. The quarterly survey, conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), is based on a random-digit-dial survey sent to immunization providers across the nation. The advantages of the information obtained are many:

- NIS data can indicate to a state where a local immunization program stands when it comes to various measures of preschool vaccination coverage.
- NIS data helps track a rise in immunizations with recently introduced vaccines
- NIS tables provide programs with the estimated percent of children who move between providers and for whom immunization registries may be especially beneficial.
- The NIS calculates the proportion of children served by various types of providers - public vs. private - to permit immunization programs to better plan their provider-based interventions.

The Immunization Bureau at the Houston Department of Health and Human Services (HDHHS) reminds all immunization providers of the importance of the survey and offers assistance in its completion.

The bureau urges providers who receive an NIS immunization history questionnaire to fill it out, attached it to the requested patient's immunization history and contact the HDHHS' Vaccines for Children (VFC) office at 713-558-3535 or Maureen Moore, registry coordinator, at 713-794-9262.

National Immunization Survey

Instruction Sheet for Immunization History Questionnaire

All VFC providers are asked to follow the instructions below when a NIS Immunization History Questionnaire is received. The completion of this survey is very important to the immunization coverage levels that are reported on a quarterly and annual basis by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention National Immunization Program. Your cooperation is very much appreciated.

1. When you receive the survey or surveys, please call VFC at 713-668-3636
2. Look up the Immunization history you have on the child or children on the survey/surveys received and make a copy of the immunization history for each child.
3. Make sure the following information is correct or attached:
 - Child's Name
 - Date of Birth
 - Current Address
 - Copy of Child's Immunization History
4. If we discover more information, a completed copy of the survey and/or immunization history will be mailed to your office for the child's or children's chart.

Remember, please do not mail surveys back to the NIS without talking to VFC first. If you have any questions about these instructions, please call Darlene Robinson at 713-668-3535 or Maureen Moore at 713-794-9262.

It is vital that providers contact HDHHS staff about the NIS immunization history questionnaire. The staff will check with other local and state sources to ensure reporting of the most accurate and complete information for each child. The collaboration will render a more accurate coverage rate for Houston.

The help by providers to improve coverage levels in Houston is needed and appreciated.

Clinician Notes

Alert issued on MCV4, Guillain Barre Syndrome

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are alerting consumers and health professionals to five reports of Guillain Barre Syndrome (GBS) following administration of a quadrivalent (A, C, Y, and W135) meningococcal conjugate vaccine (Meningococcal Polysaccharide Diphtheria Toxoid Conjugate Vaccine, Menactra® (MCV4). It is not known yet whether the cases were caused by the vaccine, manufactured by Sanofi Pasteur, or if they were coincidental.

All five cases were among 17 and 18-year-olds vaccinated between June 10 and July 25 and developed symptoms 14 to 31 days after MCV4 vaccination. The five patients received vaccine from four different lots in four states: Pennsylvania (two), New York, Ohio, and New Jersey (one case each). A sixth report of a possible case received Oct. 4 is under investigation.

GBS is a serious neurological disorder that can occur, often in healthy individuals, either spontaneously or after certain infections. GBS typically causes increasing weakness in the legs and arms, sometimes severe and requiring hospitalization. The precise rate of GBS is unknown, but data from the Vaccine Safety Datalink (VSD) indicates a background annual incidence of 1 to 2 cases per 100,000 among those between 11 and 19 years of age.

Meningococcal infection, which Menactra prevents, is a major cause of bacterial meningitis, affecting approximately one in 100,000 people annually. The infection can be life threatening: 10 percent to 14 percent of the cases are fatal and 11 percent to 19 percent of survivors may have permanent disability.

The evidence is insufficient to conclude that MCV4 causes GBS. Therefore, CDC recommends continuation of current vaccination strategies.

People with knowledge of any possible cases of GBS occurring after Menactra can report them to the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS) at www.vaers.hhs.gov or 1-800-822-7967. To review CDC's recent article in the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR) on this topic, visit www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm54d1006a1.htm

The meningococcal conjugate Vaccine Information Sheet (VIS) now reflects the potential risk of GBS. Medical providers should use the updated VIS in place of the previous edition and can find it on CDC's website at www.cdc.gov/nip/publications/VIS/default.htm. It is still an interim VIS; a final version will be available after meningococcal conjugate vaccine is added to the National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program.



Immunization conference set for March

The 2006 National Immunization Conference is set for March 6-9 at the Omni Hotel at CNN Center in Atlanta, Georgia. This year's theme is Immunization: The Cutting Edge of Public Health. It will comprise six topic tracks: Adult and Adolescent Immunization, Epidemiology and Vaccine Safety, Health and Risk Communications,

Immunization Information Systems, Programmatic Issues and Policy and Legislation. For more information or to register, visit the conference website at www.cdc.gov/nip/nic. Attendees who register before January 13 obtain the best rate.

Clinician Notes

Baylor and Methodist Hospitals Sign Agreement

A community health initiative to immunize underserved children in Houston was announced in September as one element of a new agreement between Baylor College of Medicine and The Methodist Hospital.

The initiative and agreement were the culmination of recent efforts by State Attorney General Greg Abbott and a joint committee of both organizations to redefine the relationship between the two medical institutions.

A \$16 million joint fund will be dedicated to multiple community health initiatives, including the immunization program. An immunization program will positively impact the number of young children in Houston who are not immunized. In Houston, only an estimated 65 percent of children younger than 3 years old have received their recommended vaccinations, exposing those not vaccinated to potentially life threatening diseases. Houston is second to last in the nation in the number of young children who are immunized.

The chairs of both of institutions' governing boards applauded the attorney general's leadership, which resulted in an agreement that benefits the public.

"As a result of the agreement, not only have we reaffirmed our collaboration and cooperation with each other, but both institutions committed to important community health initiatives," said John Bookout Jr., chair of the Methodist board.

"We have confirmed our resolve to work together for the benefit of the community, and we thank the attorney general for his guidance through this process."

The initiative was part of recent efforts by Abbott and a joint board committee of both organizations to redefine the relationship between the two medical institutions. The two institutions agreed upon a formal relationship focused on moving forward with the independent but related health care missions.

Although details about the community health initiative are yet to be worked out, the fund will partly support an immunization program, which could include an investment to expand parent and physician education and the local immunization registry, resulting in immunizations

for a larger number of children. The joint committee discussed in detail several main issues, including physician movement between the institutions, facilities issues, residency programs, research programs and joint clinical program.

In the agreement, both institutions vowed to have a common mission to advance medical service through professional care of the sick, the training of medical and allied health personnel, the advancement of medical knowledge through investigation and research and the promotion of personal and community health.

NIP needs volunteer testers

The National Immunization Program of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) needs health care professionals to test immunization training courses. The CDC needs physicians, pharmacists, health educators, medical assistants and nurses. For more information about becoming a tester, send an e-mail to nippilot@cdc.gov.

Finding a flu clinic just got easier!

The American Lung Association (ALA), in partnership with Maxim Health Systems, developed an electronic influenza vaccine clinic locator. Using zip codes and dates, people can locate a convenient flu clinic online by visiting www.flucliniclocator.org. It's also a great way for providers to know about other local immunization efforts. The website will be continually updated throughout the season, keeping the list current and adding information on the latest flu developments. Those interested in listing clinics on the locator can obtain instructions at <http://lungusa2.org/embargo/flucliniclocator05/#2>.

Avian influenza website

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) continues to update its avian influenza (bird flu) website. The website includes the latest bird flu information, fact sheets, a notice to travelers and a link allowing clinicians to sign up for e-mail updates. To access the website, visit www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/index.htm.

Learning Tips

Strategies to Improve Coverage of Immunization Rates in Houston/Harris County

More than 265,245 children under 5 years of age reside in Houston and Harris County. Almost 90,000 of them are not age-appropriately vaccinated, leaving them susceptible to serious and often life-threatening vaccine-preventable diseases. The Houston Department of Health and Human Services (HDHHS) and the Harris County Public Health and Environmental Services (HCPHES) urge private and public medical providers to follow the five strategies listed below to increase immunization rates in children.

Reduce Immunization Record Fragmentation

- Enroll in an immunization registry:
- Houston-Harris County Immunization Registry, www.hhcir.org
- State of Texas Immunization Registry, www.immtrac.com.
- Use the registry to look up records of each child before immunizing to avoid administering unnecessary shots; record into the registry all shots administered.

Immunize On Time, Every Time

- Check patients' immunization status at every visit; give all needed immunizations simultaneously; follow only true contraindications.
- Follow the Minimum Interval Catch-up Immunization Schedule for children who are behind, www.cdc.gov/nip/recs/child-catchup.pdf.
- Administer the birth dose of hepatitis B vaccine universally.

Remind and Recall All Children Needing Immunizations

- Use letters, postcards and phone calls - or a combination of the three - to remind parents to bring children in when immunizations are due. Recall refers to the use of the letters, postcards and phone calls to advise parents their children's shots are overdue. Both the state and local immunization registries feature reminder and recall tools.

Participate in the CDC National Immunization Survey (NIS)

- Fully complete the National Immunization Survey (NIS) questionnaires that are sent to providers to verify children's immunization histories. HDHHS and HCPHES can assist providers in completing the questionnaire by searching multiple sources and conducting home visits to obtain the most completed copy of the child's immunization record
- Contact either Maureen Moore, HDHHS registry coordinator, at 713-794-9262 or maureen.moore@cityofhouston.net or Lois Austin, HCPHES immunization program coordinator at 713-439-6113 or laustin@harriscountyhealth.com.

Ensure Vaccines are Affordable

- Enroll in the Texas Vaccines for Children Program (VFC). It provides free vaccines to providers to immunize children who are income qualified: www.tdh.state.tx.us/immunize/tvfc/
- HCPHES and HDHHS administer VFC in Houston and Harris County

Registry News

Houston-Harris County Immunization Registry



HDHHS takes ownership of Registry

The Houston Department of Health and Human Services (HDHHS) now owns the Houston-Harris County Immunization Registry, paving the way for the exchange of data with the state registry, ImmTrac. In the past, all immunization records added to local registry were reported to ImmTrac. However, ImmTrac data could not be sent to the local registry because HDHHS did not officially own it.

HDHHS, Texas Children’s Hospital and a group of mostly health care organizations launched the local registry five years ago to address the region’s problems with record fragmentation and limited access to accurate information about immunization records.

The local registry is an Internet-based system designed to serve as a confidential electronic record containing information on locally vaccinated youths.

Before its launch, there was no way to easily follow the immunization status of children who, for example, received one vaccination from a public health nurse, another from a private medical provider and yet another at one of the many immunization events sponsored by grocery stores, shopping malls, etc. HDHHS is using the registry as a tool to improve the local immunization coverage.

Did you know that...



...the Houston Harris County Immunization Registry has integrated reminder-recall features?

The registry’s workgroup manager can download monthly reminder and recall reports. The reminder report supplies medical providers participating in the registry with lists of all active clients who will need an immunization in the coming month. Likewise, the recall report lists all active clients who are past due for an immunization.

The reminder and recall reports provide the client's medical record number, name, address, city, state, zip code, date of birth and phone number. Once providers download the reports to their office computer, they can use them to send automated phone messages or print labels for post-cards or letters reminding parents that their child is due for an immunization or overdue.

For more information or to become a registry participant, call Maureen Moore, registry coordinator at 713-794-9262.

Mayor’s Initiative to Increase Number of Houstonians Immunized

As part of the Mayor’s initiative to increase the number of Houstonians immunized on time, HDHHS has launched the **“Immunize on Time, Every Time”** campaign. Be on the lookout for this promotion.

Immunize Your Child On Time, Every Time

- | | |
|----------|--------------|
| 2 months | 12-18 months |
| 4 months | 2 years |
| 6 months | 4 years |

For more information, call 311 or 713-794-9267



Vacúne a Su Niño a Tiempo

- | | |
|---------|-------------|
| 2 meses | 12-18 meses |
| 4 meses | 2 años |
| 6 meses | 4 años |

Para más información, llame al 311 o 713-794-9267

Influenza

Key Flu Resources



- **www.cdc.gov/flu - The influenza website of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).** The website contains the latest influenza information for health professionals and the public, including links to weekly surveillance reports, news releases and educational materials. The website also links to other important CDC influenza resources such as a flu gallery that contains patient and provider educational materials, **www.cdc.gov/flu/gallery**; the influenza vaccine bulletins with updates on the current vaccine supply, **www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/flubulletin.htm**; and a patient self-screening form that helps patients determine whether they are part of a priority group for inactivated influenza vaccine, **www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/pdf/early_screening_form.pdf**.
- **CDC INFO Hot Line** - Staff members at 1-800-CDC-INFO help health professionals and the public find answers to questions about influenza or other public health issues. The service is available in English and Spanish 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

- **Influenza VIS** - The National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program began covering the influenza vaccine in July. CDC strongly urges the use of interim Vaccine Information Statements (VIS). When the final statements are available, their use will be required. To obtain copies, visit: **www.cdc.gov/nip/publications/VIS/default.htm#flu**.
- **www.flucliniclocator.org - The American Lung Association (ALA) Clinic Finder** - This easy-to-use tool allows people anywhere in the country to obtain information about influenza vaccine clinics scheduled in their area. Health professionals can list clinics on the locator free of charge.
- **Health Industry Distributors Association (HIDA)** - The association's website lists contact information for all influenza vaccine distributors. Visit **www.hida.org/document.asp?document_id=10082**.
- **Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) website and hotline** - The hotline and website provide information for health professionals about billing procedures, payment rates, procedural issues and links to other helpful sites. Visit **www.cms.hhs.gov/preventiveservices/2.asp**. CMS also offers Medicare beneficiaries information and answers to questions about vaccination, particularly about Medicare coverage. Beneficiaries should call 1-800-Medicare or visit: **www.medicare.gov/health/flu.asp**.

FDA Acts to Protect Public from Fraudulent Avian Flu Therapies

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued warning letters recently to nine companies marketing bogus flu products behind claims that their products could be effective against preventing the avian flu or other forms of influenza. FDA is not aware of any scientific evidence that demonstrates the safety or effectiveness of these products for treating or preventing avian flu and the agency is concerned that the use of these products could harm consumers or interfere with conventional treatments.

“There are initiatives in place to deter counterfeiters and those who sell fraudulent or phony products to prevent or treat avian flu,” said Andrew von Eschenbach, MD, Acting FDA Commissioner. “The use of unproven flu cures and treatments increases the risk of catching and spreading the flu rather than lessening it because people assume they are protected and safe and they aren’t. I consider it a public health hazard when people are lured into using bogus treatments based on deceptive or fraudulent medical claims.”

FDA issued Warning Letters to nine firms marketing products making unproven claims that they treat or prevent avian flu or other forms of influenza. Eight of the products purported to be dietary supplements. Examples of the unproven claims cited in the Warning Letters include: “prevents avian flu”, “a natural virus shield”, “kills the virus,” and “treats the avian flu.”

These alternative therapies are promoted as “natural” or “safer” treatments that can be used in place of an approved treatment or preventative medical product.

In the Warning Letters, FDA advises the firms that it considers their products to be drugs because they claim to treat or prevent disease. The Warning Letters further state that FDA considers these products to be “new drugs” that require FDA approval before marketing. The letters also note that the claims regarding avian flu are false and misleading because there is no scientific basis for concluding that the products are effective to treat or prevent avian flu. The companies have 15 days to respond to FDA.

Immunization Bureau

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