



STATE OF NEW YORK
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

161 Delaware Avenue Delmar, NY 12054-1393

Antonia C. Novello, M.D., M.P.H., Dr. P.H.
Commissioner

Dennis P. Whalen
Executive Deputy Commissioner

October 31, 2006

DQS/DAL #06-20
Re: Flu Season

Dear Administrator:

This letter is to remind you that “flu” season is upon us. In nursing homes, an influenza outbreak can cause illness in up to 60% of residents. Of those who become sick with influenza, up to 25% may need to be hospitalized and as many as 30% may die from influenza-related complications. The Department encourages you to take every step possible to prevent an outbreak in your facility.

As you know, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) published a final rule requiring Medicare and Medicaid participating nursing homes to provide residents with the opportunity to be immunized against influenza and pneumonia.

In addition the New York State PHL Article 21-A Long Term Care Resident and Employee Immunization Act, requires a facility to provide or arrange for influenza and pneumococcal vaccination for all residents and employees. The immunization and documentation must occur before November 30th each year (with provisions made for residents/employees coming to the facility between November 30th and April 1st).

Health care workers are frequently implicated as the source of influenza transmission in health care settings. Employees continue to work while sick with influenza. Unvaccinated workers who are infected may not develop symptoms, but they can still transmit influenza to others.

Influenza vaccination is the primary means to **prevent** influenza, its transmission, and associated complications. Health care workers (HCWs) who receive the vaccine experience fewer upper respiratory infections, health care visits and sick days, use less medication, and have lower total health care costs. HCW vaccination has been shown to decrease transmission of influenza in healthcare facilities and decrease the risk of complications and death related to influenza among residents at those facilities.

In 2005, less than 40 percent of New York’s nursing homes’ staff were vaccinated against influenza. We encourage you to be innovative and proactive in educating your staff about the benefits of influenza vaccination. Not only is vaccination in their own best interests, but it also provides additional protection’s to the residents they serve.

The New York State Department of Health Immunization Program has compiled informational influenza tool kits on the New York Department of Health web site <http://www.health.state.ny.us/prevention/immunization/toolkits/>. On the left hand side under Influenza click on Health Care Providers. These resources should assist you in educating your staff and residents about influenza immunization.

Please ensure that all facility staff are knowledgeable and are aware of your responsibilities as a provider, so that the health and safety of all residents in your facility are protected. Verification of your compliance with the immunization requirements will be accomplished through the surveillance process.

Thank you in advance for your efforts to prevent influenza outbreaks in our nursing homes this season.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Keith W. Servis".

Keith W. Servis, Director
Division of Quality and Surveillance
for Nursing Homes and ICFs/MR