

Health Care Worker Influenza Immunization

The National Foundation for Infectious Diseases (NFID) has long been working toward increasing influenza vaccination rates among health care professionals. NFID is a non-profit, tax-exempt (501c3) organization founded in 1973 and dedicated to educating the public and health care professionals about the causes, treatment and prevention of infectious diseases.

NFID launched an extensive, multiyear national initiative in 2003 to address dangerously low influenza vaccination rates in health care workers and provide strategies/resources to help overcome barriers and improve vaccine uptake. For this initiative, NFID spearheaded efforts to encourage health care workers to seek an annual influenza immunization and suggest that health care institutions implement policies and programs to improve vaccination rates.

NFID's ongoing, targeted initiative brought the issue to the attention of policymakers and fueled discussion on the issue within the health care community. The National Influenza Vaccine Summit and numerous medical and public health organizations supported the goals of NFID's program and agreed health care worker influenza vaccination rates needed to increase.

NFID issued a compelling Call to Action, with strong and extensive organizational support, and presented its new campaign during the February 2004 meeting of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). Several supporting organizations further distributed the Call to Action to their members to help extend the reach of NFID's messages and encourage members and constituents to address this important issue.

In addition, NFID published a comprehensive monograph, *Improving Influenza Vaccination Rates in Health Care Workers: Strategies to Increase Protection for Workers and Patients*, which outlined the serious implications low influenza immunization rates have on health care worker and patient safety, and provided strategies and models for improving vaccination.

Many supporting organizations answered NFID's Call to Action by implementing and/or enhancing their group's commitment to improving influenza vaccination rates in health care workers, including the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO), Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America, CDC and Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology, Inc., among others.

Although there has been progress in educational efforts and changes in health care worker influenza vaccination practices, immunization rates continue to be dangerously low, at roughly 40% in the U.S., despite innovative programs being implemented around the country. Measures must be renewed to ensure health care workers are provided convenient access to influenza vaccine. More employers need to commit resources toward institutionalizing immunization. Further, education is also essential to reinforce the importance of immunization for health care workers as well as patient benefits.

NFID has remained in ongoing contact with JCAHO – a participant in NFID’s 2003 roundtable and supporter of the subsequent Call to Action and monograph on the importance of increasing health care worker influenza immunization – regarding the official CDC health care worker recommendations issued in February 2006 and the Joint Commission’s plans to develop its own standard in response. JCAHO issued an infection control standard in June 2006 requiring accredited organizations to offer influenza vaccinations to staff. The standard took effect on January 1, 2007, for critical access hospital, hospital and long term care accreditation programs.

NFID has several activities planned for the upcoming influenza season designed to refocus discussion on the importance of increasing immunization rates for health care workers.

Best Practices Toolkit

NFID will convene a roundtable meeting in October 2007. Based on presentations at that roundtable, as well as input from roundtable participants, a best practices guide will be developed and published. This document will detail implementation strategies designed to increase health care worker immunization rates. In addition, this grant will assist in the creation of a complementary public health initiative through the Service Employees International Union to encourage higher vaccination rates among union member health care professionals. The toolkit is supported by an unrestricted educational grant from CSL Biotherapies.

Teleconference

NFID will sponsor a media teleconference in mid-November 2007 focusing on health care worker immunization. The teleconference will be moderated by NFID vice president, William Schaffner, M.D., and will include presentations from experts in the field. The teleconference is supported by an unrestricted educational grant from GlaxoSmithKline.

Call to Action Update

NFID will update its 2003 Call to Action by producing a “Progress 2007” report (i.e., update of initial Call to Action, including summary of efforts/successes to date). Included in this initiative will be outreach to organizational supporters to update them on new efforts and confirm continued support; posting via NFID Web site and encouraging organizational link exchange; official announcement of renewed program efforts during February 2008 ACIP meeting and relevant Healthcare Infection Control Practices Advisory Committee meetings; announcing strategy/new efforts via trade and key policy/national media relations. The Progress 2007 report is supported by an unrestricted educational grant from sanofi pasteur.