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APIC CALLS FOR ANNUAL FLU IMMUNIZATION FOR HEALTHCARE WORKERS

Personnel Who Decline Must Acknowledge Risk To Patients

Washington, DC, October 9, 2008 – In response to the low rates of influenza immunization among healthcare personnel, the Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology (APIC) today announced its support for requiring flu immunization for healthcare workers who have direct patient contact as well as ancillary staff. APIC further recommended that healthcare facilities obtain informed statements acknowledging the risk to patients from employees who decline the vaccine for reasons other than medical.

The recommendations are published in the APIC position paper, [Influenza Immunization of Healthcare Personnel](#). APIC states that healthcare facilities should implement a comprehensive strategy incorporating all of the guidelines for influenza vaccination of healthcare personnel from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Healthcare Infection Control Practices Advisory Committee (HICPAC) and the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP).

"We must do a better job of immunizing healthcare workers every year to ensure patient safety and protect those individuals at high risk of developing complications of influenza," said Linda R. Greene, RN, MPS, CIC, lead author of APIC's position paper and director of infection prevention and control at Rochester General Health System. "Despite longstanding recommendations by government agencies and national healthcare organizations, only 42 percent of healthcare workers receive yearly flu vaccines. Voluntary efforts are clearly not effective – it's time for hospitals and other healthcare facilities to require influenza immunization."

Influenza is a highly contagious disease that can be spread before symptoms appear. If a healthcare worker contracts the flu, they may spread influenza infection to patients and other workers before realizing they are sick. The CDC estimates that influenza results in 226,000 hospitalizations and 36,000 deaths annually in the U.S.

APIC recommendations for influenza immunization apply to healthcare personnel in acute care hospitals, nursing homes, skilled nursing facilities, physician's offices, urgent care centers, outpatient settings and home health settings. All employees with direct patient contact should be immunized annually including physicians, nurses, therapists, dietitians, religious workers, housekeeping and kitchen staff.

According to a recent poll of APIC members, the rate of flu immunization among infection preventionists – healthcare professionals who direct programs to reduce the risk of infection in their facilities -- is 93 percent, well above the 42 percent rate for all healthcare workers.

“As infection preventionists we must lead efforts to implement proven strategies to ensure that all healthcare workers are immunized,” said Greene. “By following a set of evidence-based measures, institutions can significantly raise yearly flu immunization rates and protect patients, employees and their families from serious illness.”

For additional information on the importance of immunization against the flu and a free toolkit to help healthcare facilities improve their vaccination rates, please visit <http://www.apic.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Influenza&Template=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=10135>.

APIC's mission is to improve health and patient safety by reducing risks of infection and other adverse outcomes. The association's 12,000 members direct infection prevention programs that save lives and improve the bottom line for hospitals and other healthcare facilities around the globe. APIC advances its mission through education, research, collaboration, practice guidance, public policy and credentialing. Visit APIC online at www.apic.org

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