April 27, 2020

Please note that Weekly Flu News will go on hiatus starting May 1st

Because the 2019-2020 flu season is drawing to a close, our Weekly Flu News will be on hiatus from May 1 to August 15. Please note that we will continue to distribute our quarterly newsletter, Fighting Influenza, and will remain active on our social media channels (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn), so follow us there to stay up-to-date!

It's National Infant Immunization Week!

National Infant Immunization Week (NIIW) is April 25-May 2, 2020. NIIW focuses on the positive impact of vaccination on the lives of infants and children. Healthcare professionals are on the front lines of the fight against vaccine-preventable diseases. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that routine immunization of children born between 1994 and 2018 will prevent an estimated 419 million illnesses, 26.8 million hospitalizations, and 936,000 early deaths over their lifetimes, at a net savings of $406 billion in direct costs and $1.88 trillion in total economic impact.

The CDC, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), and the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) are reminding parents to continue with routine childhood immunizations during the COVID-19 pandemic. Learn more here.
Laboratory confirmed flu activity as reported by clinical laboratories is now low. 0.4% of specimens from clinical laboratories tested positive for influenza. Nationally, influenza A (H1N1) viruses are now the most commonly reported influenza viruses this season. 2.2% of visits to a health care provider were for influenza-like illness. Four of 10 regions remain above their baselines. The overall hospitalization rate is 68.6 per 100,000. 11.4% of deaths were attributed to pneumonia and influenza, which is above the epidemic threshold. One new pediatric flu death was reported for the 2019-2020 season during week 16. The total for the season is 169.
The director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warned Tuesday that a second wave of the novel coronavirus will be far more dire because it is likely to coincide with the start of flu season.

“There’s a possibility that the assault of the virus on our nation next winter will actually be even more difficult than the one we just went through,” CDC Director Robert Redfield said in an interview with The Washington Post.

Having two simultaneous respiratory outbreaks would put unimaginable strain on the health-care system, he said. The first wave of covid-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus, has already killed more than 42,000 people across the country. It has overwhelmed hospitals and revealed gaping shortages in test kits, ventilators and protective equipment for health-care workers.

As Covid-19 surges, a UNICEF report warned that more than 117 million children are at risk of missing out on life-saving measles vaccinations. UNICEF urged countries to continue essential immunization, but said postponement could happen where the risk is "unacceptably high."

Scientists are racing to produce a coronavirus inoculation on an unprecedented timescale. But the virus has also done something more startling. It has made some anti-vaxxers change their minds.

Isaac Lindenberger, who grew up with a mother in Ohio who opposes vaccinations, believes it is harder to deny the effectiveness of vaccines when you’re facing a pandemic. "Anti-vaxxers are still here. But they’re not showing themselves because during a pandemic of an infectious disease, it’s probably the wrong time to try to call out preventative measures," Lindenberger said. "They’re kind of in their echo chambers."

The “COVID-19 forecast hub,” developed by the UMass Influenza Forecasting Center of Excellence team, compiles information from 11 models created by seven expert teams from around the world. The university's Influenza Forecasting Center, headed by UMass biostatistician Nicholas Reich, is one
of just two U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention flu forecasting facilities in the country.

“When you’re forecasting seasonal flu, you have 15 to 20 years of data you can look to and have your models learn patterns from these previous years of data,” Reich said. “With COVID-19, we have nothing like that. We have barely two months and are learning as we go.” But the method of collecting and aggregating the COVID-19 data is “in many ways the same,” Reich said. The team’s “ensemble model” draws from a range of forecasts with sometimes vastly contrasting messages.

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**Covid 19 coronavirus: Record number of Kiwis get the flu jab before winter**

**Apr. 27, 2020; New Zealand Herald**

Just shy of 600,000 Kiwis have already had the flu jab this year, more than double the number of those vaccinated this time last year.

Associate Health Minister Julie Anne Genter said that despite the national lockdown, the record-breaking vaccination programme immunised a number of those at risk. "Last year only one in four New Zealanders got their flu vaccine, while this year we are on track for more than one in three New Zealanders to get vaccinated."

While the flu vaccination does not protect against Covid-19, it reduces the burden on the healthcare system, which sees a surge in flu cases come winter. Paired with coronavirus patients, hospitals could quickly be swamped.

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**Centralized Reminder/Recall to Increase Influenza Vaccination Rates: A Two-State Pragmatic Randomized Trial**

**Apr. 1, 2020; Academic Pediatrics**

One evidence-based method for increasing vaccination rates is reminder/recall messages, which can improve both routine childhood/adolescent and influenza vaccination rates. The study was conducted within Colorado and New York in order to be able to contrast different IIS (Immunization Information System) reporting laws, different experiences with C-R/R (Centralized Reminder/Recall), and different regulatory guidelines regarding community vaccinators.

The primary study outcome was documentation of ≥ 1 influenza vaccine within 6 months. Results show very small effects of the intervention in 2 contrasting states - Colorado and New York.

It important to note, however, that small increases in influenza rates may have substantial benefit at the population level. A recent modeling study demonstrated that a 5% increase in influenza vaccine coverage among children 6 months to 17 years could result in 282,000 fewer influenza infections and 1,440 fewer hospitalizations during a severe influenza season.