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Oregon Public Health study looks at main reasons moms get their toddlers flu vaccine

New study published in the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report Friday, July 29 shows that consistent health insurance for children increases flu immunization

One of the main findings of an Oregon study is that children with uninterrupted health insurance coverage had higher rates of vaccination.

The study, Socioeconomic Characteristics of Mothers and Healthcare Behaviors Associated with Influenza Vaccination of their Preschool Children, was published today in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report.

"Young children are at high risk for complications from influenza, and the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends that they be vaccinated annually," said the study's co-author Kenneth Rosenberg, Oregon Health Authority's Public Health Division. "We wanted to know whether Oregon children are actually getting the vaccine." Rosenberg is a maternal and child health epidemiologist in the Office of Family Health. Timothy Cunningham, Sc.D., Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Epidemic Intelligence Service Officer, was co-author.

Rosenberg and Cunningham reviewed surveys taken between 2006 and 2008 from 1,489 Oregon mothers through the Oregon Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring Survey (PRAMS). They found that less than half of 2-year-olds received a flu vaccine during the 2009-10 flu season. The study found that children with uninterrupted health insurance coverage were more likely to get the flu vaccine than those with gaps in the coverage. Children who saw a family practice physician were significantly less likely to be vaccinated than those who saw a pediatrician.

"It's clear that health care coverage encourages vaccination rates," said Rosenberg.

(more)

Oregon’s ALERT Immunization Information System, a registry that records most immunizations administered in Oregon, shows a 49 percent rate of flu vaccination for babies 19-35 months old during the 2009-10 flu season; 35,597 children received at least one dose of seasonal influenza vaccine that year.

Researchers anticipate that the number of children in Oregon receiving regular flu vaccinations will rise as the number of children without health care continues to decline. The implementation of the Healthy Kids program has created a dramatic decline in the number of uninsured children during the past two years. The number of uninsured children with health insurance fell from 11.3 percent in 2009 to 5.6 percent today.

Getting the flu vaccine is the best way to prevent influenza, and the CDC recommends that everyone over 6 months of age get a seasonal flu immunization. In Oregon, children 2 years of age and younger are more than three times as likely to be hospitalized for influenza as older children. Unlike older children and adults who may have partial immunity from previous bouts of influenza, young children are likely to be completely susceptible to the virus, said Rosenberg.

According to the CDC, 113 children died from influenza in the U.S. during the 2010-11 flu season. Unvaccinated preschoolers can pass flu germs to newborns, who can’t be immunized until they are 6 months old.

Rosenberg’s study recommended the following:

- Parents should seek flu vaccine early in the season, seizing the first opportunity to get their children vaccinated.
- Community-based strategies aimed at providing all children access to flu vaccines – as well as other recommended immunizations – should be implemented, including making children eligible for free vaccinations through the Oregon Vaccines for Children program.

“In short, parents need to get their children vaccinated against the flu and as soon as possible. Next season’s flu vaccine is now arriving in Oregon and we urge parents to vaccinate their children,” said Rosenberg.

For more information on influenza and where to get a flu immunization as the vaccine becomes available, visit www.flu.oregon.gov or call the Oregon Flu Hotline at 800-978-3040. Read the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report article, at www.cdc.gov/mmwr.

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