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**New Recommendations Take Aim to Improve Influenza  
Vaccination Rates Among the Nation's Health Care  
Workers**

***National Foundation for Infectious Diseases Applauds CDC for  
Action on Important Public Health Issue***

BETHESDA, Md., (February 9, 2006) — Stronger recommendations calling for annual influenza immunization among health care workers were published today in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*. The National Foundation for Infectious Diseases (NFID) applauds the CDC for taking action on this issue and outlining strategies that hospitals, long-term care facilities and other health care settings can use to increase use of influenza vaccine within their institutions.

"NFID has championed a national initiative involving more than 20 professional groups to improve health care worker influenza immunization rates, and is pleased with the stronger CDC recommendations issued today," said William Schaffner, M.D., NFID board member and professor and chair of the Department of Preventive Medicine at Vanderbilt University School of Medicine. "A key part of the recommendations are for health care facilities to develop systems to track immunization rates among health care workers and provide feedback during the influenza vaccination campaign, which will allow institutions to better manage information and in turn, increase immunization rates and improve patient safety."

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The CDC issued the recommendations in response to persistently low influenza vaccination rates among health care workers. The recommendations were jointly developed by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) and the Healthcare Infection Control Practices Advisory Committee (HICPAC) at the meetings of each committee in June 2005.

“Research shows that health care workers infected with influenza can transmit the virus to seriously ill patients in their care, many of whom may be at high risk for influenza-related complications, which may result in prolonged hospitalization, admission to the intensive care unit and even death,” said Dr. Schaffner.

Annual influenza immunization has long been recommended for health care workers, although each year less than 40 percent of the nation’s health care professionals receive vaccine. Today’s recommendations provide evidence-based guidance for health care institutions nationwide to assist in efforts to improve compliance with the longstanding recommendations that health care workers receive an annual influenza vaccination.

In addition, the Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations released for review a proposed infection control standard requiring accredited-health care organizations to offer influenza vaccinations to staff, volunteers and licensed independent practitioners.

Several factors may lead to low influenza vaccination rates among health care workers, including lack of awareness of the recommendation for annual immunization, lack of access to vaccine, vaccine cost, misperception that influenza is not a serious disease and low awareness/lack of concern about potential spread of the virus to patients. Annually in the United States, influenza causes an average of 36,000 deaths and more than 200,000 hospitalizations.

#### NFID’s Health Care Worker Initiative

The National Foundation for Infectious Diseases spearheaded a comprehensive initiative to encourage health care workers to receive an annual influenza immunization and suggest that health care institutions implement policy and programs to improve vaccination rates.

In early 2004, NFID published a “Call to Action” supported by more than 20 of the nation’s leading medical organizations, including the American Medical Association, American Academy of Family Physicians, American Academy of Pediatrics and the CDC, all of which agreed annual influenza vaccination among health care workers is an important goal for improved public health and patient safety.

NFID also published a comprehensive report, *Improving Influenza Vaccination Rates in Health Care Workers: Strategies to Increase Protection for Workers and Patients*, which outlined the serious implication low influenza immunization rates have on patient safety, and provided strategies to address the issue. Both publications are available on NFID’s Web site, [www.nfid.org](http://www.nfid.org).

*Founded in 1973, NFID is a non-profit organization dedicated to public and professional educational programs about infectious diseases.*

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