Bobby Jindal
GOVERNOR

Bruce D. Greenstein
SECRETARY

State of Louisiana

Department of Health and Hospitals

Office of the State Health Officer

10/04/2012

Dear Louisiana Healthcare Provider,

The American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecology (ACOG) as well as the CDC recently issued new recommendations that all pregnant women, regardless of how far along in the pregnancy, should get yearly flu shots to protect, not only themselves but also their babies from serious illness and death. As the Louisiana State Health Officer, I strongly encourage influenza vaccination to maintain high coverage levels, especially in pregnant women. Regrettably, one out of every 20 people who died from the recent H1N1 flu virus was a pregnant woman.

Vaccination of pregnant women provides a dual benefit. The vaccine produces antibodies that protect the mother both during and after pregnancy, and also provides the baby maternal immunity for months after birth. Babies cannot get the flu vaccine until they are 6 months old. Until then any protection they may have is provided by the immunity their mother develops after her immunization.

In addition, the flu vaccine can even help prevent babies from being born prematurely. This exceptional benefit is seen only during the flu season (October through March) and does not impact the likelihood of being born preterm at other times of the year. What this implies is that influenza may contribute to a high proportion (70% or more) of infants being born premature. For this reason and others, increasing influenza vaccination coverage among pregnant women should be of the highest priority for medical providers.

Pregnant women should only receive the inactivated flu vaccine which is given via a shot. Millions of pregnant women have safely received the flu shot over the years. The live, attenuated influenza vaccine (LAIV), which is delivered via nasal spray, should not be given to pregnant women.

It is not sufficient for providers just to target pregnant women. Up to 50% of people with the flu may be unaware they have it because they are asymptomatic; yet these individuals are still capable of infecting others., everyone in the family over 6 months old should get immunized against the flu. Hundreds of millions of adults and children have received the flu vaccine over the last 45 years and studies consistently have shown the vaccine to be proven, safe and cost-effective.

Please actively promote influenza vaccination! Please download the link to the MMWR concerning Influenza and Pregnant Women at:
http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6138a2.htm?s_cid=mm6138a2_w , and visit the CDC influenza website at http://www.cdc.gov/Flu/ or contact the Louisiana Office of Public Health Immunization Program at 504-838-5300 if you have questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Jimmy Guidry, MD

Jimmy Guidry, MD
Louisiana State Health Officer

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