



STATE OF NEW YORK DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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Antonia C. Novello, M.D., M.P.H., Dr.P.H.
Commissioner

Dennis P. Whalen
Executive Deputy Commissioner

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Dear Insurer:

The purpose of this letter is to strongly recommend that all health care insurers, including managed care organizations and commercial insurers, fully cover the cost of all influenza vaccines for persons 6 months of age and older.

Influenza vaccines are the primary methods for preventing influenza disease and reducing the risk of influenza-related complications. Multiple studies regarding the impact of influenza vaccination have reported substantial reductions in hospitalizations and deaths, and overall societal cost savings (1). Influenza vaccination can reduce both direct medical costs and indirect costs such as productivity losses associated with influenza illness.

In the United States, there are currently two types of influenza vaccines available for use: the injectable, inactivated influenza vaccine; and the live, attenuated influenza vaccine (LAIV) known as FluMist™. Both types of vaccines are similarly effective in preventing influenza disease and its complications, including death. One study indicated that the LAIV may be more effective than the injectable vaccine when the strains in the vaccine are not well-matched to the circulating strains causing disease. Because LAIV is a relatively new vaccine, a fact sheet is enclosed with additional information and references.

It is extremely important and strongly recommended that all residents of New York State have access to influenza vaccine. Coverage is assured for all children under 19 years of age who are eligible through the Vaccines for Children (VFC) Program. It is equally important to ensure that privately insured children and all adults have access to vaccination. As you are aware, recent influenza seasons have been plagued by vaccine supply and distribution problems; therefore, it is important that insurers reimburse for any influenza vaccine formulation that the health care provider can obtain for use.

The New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) urges all managed care organizations and commercial insurers to cover influenza vaccine, both the inactivated vaccine and the LAIV. If you have any additional questions about influenza vaccine and insurance coverage, please call the NYSDOH Immunization Program at 518-473-4437, or the NYSDOH Office of Managed Care at 518-486-6865. Thank you for your help in reducing the impact of influenza disease and ensuring vaccination of New York State citizens.

Sincerely,

Antonia C. Novello, M.D., M.P.H., Dr.P.H.
Commissioner of Health

Enclosure

References

1. CDC. Prevention and Control of Influenza: Recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). MMWR, June, 2006; 55(Early Release): 1-41.