

November 27, 2007

Dear Senator:

Thanks to Congressional leadership and an unprecedented federal investment, our nation has made significant strides with respect to preparing for a possible pandemic flu outbreak. However some serious gaps still remain. One of the most glaring is how to treat and care for the nation's 73.6 million children and teenagers during an influenza pandemic. Children are not simply "small adults" and their unique health needs must become a priority when it comes to pandemic preparedness activities.

That's why Trust for America's Health and the American Academy of Pediatrics are pleased to provide you with a copy of *Pandemic Influenza: Warning, Children At-Risk*. This issue brief focuses on four key areas of concern: child-appropriate doses of vaccine and medications; management and treatment of children who become ill; including children in strategies to slow the spread of influenza in communities; and caring for and supervising the health of children if schools and childcare facilities are closed for extended periods of time. We also provide a series of specific public policy recommendations to address these shortcomings for your consideration.

Pandemic flu is not the routine, relatively predictable seasonal flu virus. Unlike the seasonal flu, a pandemic flu virus poses a novel threat since humans would have no previously developed immunity against this new virus strain, putting most people at high risk for infection. This could result in a large percentage of the world's population being infected by a rapidly spreading virus in a very short period of time. We are particularly worried that the H5N1 "bird" flu virus now circulating in Asia and elsewhere has disproportionately infected young people: children and teens between the ages of 0-19 account for nearly 46 percent of all deaths from the H5N1 flu virus.

We studied pediatric pandemic preparedness at the nation level and identified several shortfalls, including:

- There are currently only 100,000 courses of antivirals for children in the Strategic National Stockpile. There are more than 70 million children in the U.S. A severe pandemic outbreak could result in 25 percent of the U.S. population becoming ill. Children are known to often be disproportionately impacted by contagious respiratory illnesses. Clearly the pediatric stockpile of antiviral medicines is insufficient.
- Neither of the two antiviral drugs that have been shown effective against H5N1 are licensed for children younger than 1 year of age.
- A vaccine that is well-matched for a pandemic would not be available for at least 6 months after a major outbreak begins, and tests would have to be conducted to determine safety levels for children and adults once it is available.
- The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that the public consider using of N95 respirator masks in certain circumstances during a pandemic outbreak, however, N95 respirator masks are not currently produced in children's sizes or approved for use in children.

Among the report's key policy recommendations for reducing the impact of pandemic flu on children:

- The Federal government should ensure that the Strategic National Stockpile includes sufficient pediatric doses of antiviral medications to ensure treatment of 25 percent of the nation's children and adolescents, or about 18.4 million individuals.
- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) should conduct additional studies on vaccine efficacy in young children, support the development of additional flu vaccine products, and conduct more studies of antiviral agents for infants.
- HHS should immediately convene an independent task force to study and make specific recommendations about the use of surgical masks, N95 respirators, and other personal protective equipment by children.
- HHS should conduct further studies on the feasibility of prolonged school and childcare center closures, including a more precise assessment of the long-term interruption of the school meals program and how to mitigate the impact on students who rely on them.
- Educators and school administrators should be encouraged to get an annual influenza vaccination and should remind families that public health experts recommend annual flu vaccines for 1) all children with high risk conditions who are 6 months of age and older, 2) all healthy children ages 6 months through 59 months, 3) all household contacts and out-of-home caregivers of children with high risk conditions and of children younger than 5 years if age, and 4) all health care professionals.
- CDC and state and local health departments should encourage and support seasonal flu vaccination clinics in school settings to maximize flu vaccine coverage rates.

If a pandemic flu occurs in the United States, the social, economic, and emotional toll on the nation would be devastating. While we applaud the federal government for its continuing attention to the threat of a flu pandemic, we urge you to take into account the special needs of America's children and youth.

Sincerely,



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Trust for America's Health



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The American Academy of Pediatrics is an organization of 60,000 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety and well being of infants, children, adolescents and young adults.

Trust for America's Health is a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to saving lives by protecting the health of every community and working to make disease prevention a national priority.