

PRESS RELEASE
October 12, 2004

MASON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
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TO: KMAS, KRXY, SHELTON-MASON COUNTY JOURNAL, THE OLYMPIAN, SHELTON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, NORTH MASON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, CITY OF SHELTON, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL, THE SUN

RE: Flu Vaccine Shortage

CHIRON Corporation, one of two Influenza vaccine manufacturers had their license pulled by the British Government because of sterility issues. They were scheduled to produce approximately 50% of the nations' 2004 Influenza vaccine supply. Mason County Health Department as well as other health care providers in the county had their orders for vaccine cancelled because of this action. This cancellation of our Departments' 2,000 doses along with the others means that we are approximately 2,800 doses short this year in Mason County, and will be unable to immunize all of our high-risk population. We have received 225 doses of children's flu vaccine dedicated to our high risk children for distribution to our community health care providers who participate in our Vaccine for Children's Program. We will distribute this as soon as we receive authorization from WA Department of Health (DOH).

Aventis, the other flu vaccine manufacturer has about 54 million doses for the US market this year and they have shipped out more than half of the supply. We have been told that the Center for Disease Control (CDC) has asked them to hold further shipments. Our Department and others in the county contacted them last week and were informed that no new orders were being accepted since all their vaccine was committed. There is a statewide conference call scheduled later this week with Health Departments throughout the state and DOH to discuss the situation. Mason County Health Department is working with the rest of the public health community on the local, state, and federal level to help ensure that persons at highest risk for complications from influenza are able to receive the available flu vaccine.

Those individuals who are not in a high-risk group are being asked to step aside this year and let the shots go to the folks who are most at risk from complications should they contract the illness. The following are the priorities for those who should be vaccinated this year:

- all children aged 6-23 months:
- adults aged 65 years and older
- persons aged 2-65 years with underlying medical conditions
- all women who will be pregnant during flu season
- residents of nursing homes and long-term care facilities
- children 6 months to 18 years of age on aspirin therapy
- health-care workers with direct patient care, and
- out-of-home caregivers and household contacts of children under 6 months of age

Vaccination is not the only way to help prevent the flu. You can still protect yourself from the flu, even if you are not included in a priority group for the flu season this year, or if no vaccines are available. According to the CDC, these simple actions can stop the spread of germs and help protect you from getting sick:

- **Avoid close contact:** Avoid Close contact with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick too.
- **Stay home when you are sick:** If possible, stay home from work, school, and errands when you are sick. You will help prevent others from catching your illness.
- **Cover your mouth and nose:** Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. It may prevent those around you from getting sick.
- **Clean your hands:** Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs.
- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth:** Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Other good habits, such as **getting plenty of sleep**, engaging in **physical activity**, **managing stress**, **drinking water**, and **eating good food**, will help you stay healthy in the winter and all year.

One of the complications of flu illness can be Pneumococcal Pneumonia. In preparation for this flu season, Mason County Health Department ordered Pneumonia vaccine for our community clinics. Those at high risk of fatal infections include individuals age 65 and older, those with anatomical or functional asplenia, sickle cell disease, HIV infection, and a variety of chronic systemic illnesses, including heart and lung disease, cirrhosis of the liver, renal insufficiency and diabetes mellitus. Because risk of infection and case-fatality rates increase with age, benefits of immunization increase also. In addition, persons 65 years of age and older should be given a second dose of vaccine if they received the vaccine more than 5 years previously and were less than 65 at the time of primary immunization. Physicians may recommend that their patients with high risk factors receive a booster immunization.

As an added service to our Mason County residents this year we ordered and planned to also provide Tetanus/Diphtheria immunizations at our community clinics. Immunization is recommended for universal use regardless of age and is especially important for those who come in frequent contact with the soil, sewage and domestic animals. Active protection should be maintained by receiving a booster dose of Td every 10 years.

Mason County Health Department continues to monitor the availability of flu vaccine clinics that are available to the general public. This information is available by calling **24 hours a day** our **automated flu information line at 427-9670 ext. 599 or from Belfair, 275-4467 ext. 599**. This information line is updated whenever we have new information throughout the flu season. For those who desire either a Pneumonia or Tetanus/Diphtheria vaccination, telephone 427-9670 ext. 720 or from Belfair 275-4467 ext. 720 for an appointment. For additional information, you may contact Lydia Buchheit at 360-427-9670, Ext. 404, or Steve Kutz at ext. 260.

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