



Six Simple Messages for Promoting Influenza Immunizations in California's Ethnic Communities in 2006/2007

The best way to protect children – and especially the infants too young to be immunized – is to immunize the adults and kids around them.

Across California, influenza immunization rates remain low and influenza complications continue to cause significant morbidity and mortality. In 2003, 8,184 Californians lost their lives due to vaccine-preventable influenza and pneumonia, making it the sixth leading cause of death among adults. Furthermore, marked ethnic disparities in immunization rates persist. For instance, in 2003, significantly more African Americans ages 50-64 reported **not** receiving an influenza immunization in the past 12 months (67%) than Whites (59.0%) and Asians/Pacific Islanders (55.1%).

Promoting culturally-appropriate messages in ethnic communities can help improve influenza immunization coverage levels. The California Coalition for Childhood Immunization encourages you to use the following six simple messages to promote influenza vaccination in your community. You may integrate these messages into your educational materials, public service announcements, presentations, and one-on-one discussions with community members.

Flu immunizations CANNOT and DO NOT cause the flu!

- To get the flu, a person must come in contact with a flu virus that is living and active. Flu shots do not have any viruses that are alive. The viruses in flu shots that help prevent flu complications are dead (killed or inactivated). These dead viruses cannot cause the flu. The nasal spray (Flu-Mist) that can prevent serious flu complications for healthy people aged 5-49, contains only weakened virus that will not cause serious flu symptoms.
- Understanding why people may believe they can get the flu from the shot or the nasal spray can help you respond to their concerns and convince them that they cannot get the flu from the immunization.

Why might people think they got the flu from the flu shot?

They came down with the flu soon after they got their immunization.

Remind these individuals that you can still get the flu if you got your immunization because the flu immunization only protects against 3 of the viruses that could cause serious complications. However, if they get the flu after getting a flu immunization, they'll have a much milder case.

They had flu-like symptoms (fever, soreness in the arm, etc) after getting the immunization.

These symptoms are probably a mild reaction to the shot or nasal spray. Remind these individuals that this mild reaction is much less serious than the flu.

They got another infection that they confuse with the flu.

Remind these individuals that there is a difference between a cold or bacterial infection and the flu. The flu immunization does not protect against all infections but is very effective in protecting against 3 flu viruses that can cause serious complications.

Flu immunizations are SAFE.

- Flu shots and the nasal spray were tested with thousands of people before they were approved to be given in the U.S.
- Flu immunizations are safe for infants over the age of 6 months, children, teens, adults and older adults.
- The flu shot or nasal spray can cause mild side effects like a slight fever but these side effects are much less serious than the flu!

The flu is serious, especially for children under age two.

- Children under two years old are much more likely to become seriously ill from the flu than older children and adults under the age of 65.

Healthy kids and adults need flu immunizations too!

- Children under six years old could become very ill from the flu, even if they are healthy. Protect them by:
 - Making sure they get their flu shot.
 - Getting your flu vaccination and making sure others who have close contact with them (siblings; parents; grandparents; and childcare providers, including baby sitters) get theirs too. This is especially important for infants under the age of 6 months who can become very ill from the flu but are too young to get the flu shot. The only way you can protect them is to get your flu immunization and make sure that people who have contact with them get theirs.

Prevent the spread of germs by washing your hands and covering your cough.

- Wash your hands often with warm water and soap and teach your kids to do the same. This simple everyday task can make a big difference by reducing the number of germs that live on your hands and preventing the flu virus from spreading.
- You can also prevent the spread of the flu by covering your mouth and nose with a tissue or your upper sleeve when you cough.

December, January, even February is not too late to get a flu immunization for your child or yourself.

- Children from 6-59 months of age and their close contacts should get their flu immunization in September or October but if they missed getting their immunization, it's not too late. The most cases of flu usually are in February. So, if you or your child did not get a flu immunization in September or October, you should still consider getting one in November, December, or beyond!