Dear Colleagues

**Eligibility changes to funded influenza vaccine - young children with respiratory illness**

This week the Minister of Health announced that children under the age of five years who have been hospitalised for a respiratory illness, or have a history of significant respiratory illness, will be funded for influenza vaccine from 1 April 2013.

The decision to fund this group follows advice from PHARMAC’s newly-formed immunisation subcommittee. The subcommittee looked at evidence for immunising young children against influenza and recommended the highest-risk group – those with a history of significant respiratory illness – be funded.


**Current advice**

*The Immunisation Handbook 2011* currently recommends that children with the following respiratory conditions are eligible for funded influenza vaccine and should be prioritised for recall for influenza vaccination as they are most at risk:

- all asthmatics on regular preventive therapy
- other children with chronic respiratory disorders (e.g., cystic fibrosis, non-cystic fibrosis bronchiectasis, and chronic lung condition lung disease of infancy).

The eligibility is now broadened beyond this advice and the NISG folder to include any child, between 6 months and under 5 years of age who has either had a hospital admission for a respiratory disease or, in the opinion of the GP, has a significant respiratory disease.

Refer to *the Immunisation Handbook 2011* for the other chronic conditions for which the influenza vaccine is funded.

**Doses and administration**

Children aged less than nine years who have not previously received influenza vaccine require two doses of vaccine four weeks apart to produce a satisfactory immune response. Children aged 6 – 35 months are given a 0.25 mL dose. See table below and vaccine manufacturer datasheet.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Dose</th>
<th>Number of doses</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6–35 months</td>
<td>0.25 mL</td>
<td>1 or 2&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3–8 years</td>
<td>0.5 mL</td>
<td>1 or 2&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<sup>a</sup>: Two doses separated by at least four weeks if the vaccine is being used for the first time.

**Contraindications**

A recent study suggests that the risk of febrile convulsions in children given seasonal flu vaccine is significantly higher if they are given pneumococcal conjugate vaccine 13 at the same time. Therefore as a precaution we would recommend administering these on separate occasions.

**Influenza Vaccine**

FLUARIX vaccine is the funded vaccine recommended for all children aged nine years and under. In order to ensure supply is maintained please restrict the administration of FLUARIX vaccine to only children aged nine years and under.
Claiming the immunisation benefit
The Ministry's payment system is already set up and can receive claims for this new eligibility change. To claim, apply "under sixteen, eligible condition". Please note that claims must be submitted within eight months of the date from when the patient received the influenza vaccine. Funded vaccine eligible for payment must be administered before 31 July. This includes the second dose for those aged nine years and under.

Co-administration of influenza vaccine and Pneumovax 23
CSL has noted that there is an increase in cases of large injection site swelling when Fluvax is given in the same arm as Pneumovax 23. They have updated the data sheet to state that other vaccines should be given in a separate arm. As a precaution vaccinators should administer flu vaccine in a different arm to Pneumovax 23.

*If you have any queries about anything in this update, please email immunisation@moh.govt.nz*