



News Release

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Immunizations needed to ensure health, readiness

By Kirk Frady

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The month of August has been designated as National Immunization & Influenza Vaccination Awareness Month. It is critically important that every Soldier, Family member, DA Civilian and health beneficiary receive all required immunizations and obtain their influenza vaccinations to ensure the Army is a healthy and mission ready Force.

Army clinics across Europe expect to begin offering influenza vaccinations in September to coincide with the start of the school year. As students returned to school after travelling during the summer, their proximity in the school setting makes them more likely to come into contact with the flu virus and then carry it home to their family, said Col. Carlheinz Stokes, Europe Regional Medical Command Force Health Protection director.

The dominant strain of influenza during the upcoming flu season is still expected to be the H1N1 strain from the 2009 pandemic. Col. Richard Looney, director of the Army's Military Vaccination (MILVAX) Program said, "H1N1 is still circulating, but due to outstanding efforts and immunization campaigns of the past few years, people are more aware and likely to be adequately protected during the height of flu season." He went on to say, "Influenza immunization rates have gone up every year, and there's no reason to expect they won't go up again during the 2012-13 season."

"Immunization is the very best protection against disease and related complications. Vaccines are safe and effective, and have saved more lives than any other medical measure in history," he added.

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Immunizations are really the best protection against disease and have saved more lives than any other medical measure in history. “Immunizations have prevented approximately 42,000 deaths and 20 million cases of disease over the past decade,” Looney said, “Those preventive efforts have also saved billions of dollars in related healthcare costs and total societal costs. Morbidity from vaccine-preventable diseases has fallen 90 percent or more for most diseases since the 20th century.”

A majority of disease outbreaks in the U.S. occur in unvaccinated or inadequately vaccinated populations. Measles made a comeback in the U.S. partly because unvaccinated people traveled to Europe, contracted the disease and returned home. Incidence of pertussis (whooping cough) have increased largely due to vaccination coverage rates going down, resulting in a recommendation from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that everyone receive one lifetime booster dose of a pertussis-containing vaccine. Other vaccine-preventable diseases include polio, mumps, rubella, chickenpox, meningococcal disease, pneumonia, tetanus, diphtheria, human papillomavirus, shingles, and Haemophilus influenza B (hib).

A common misconception is that vaccinations are just for kids. Everyone over the age of six months should receive a seasonal flu shot every year. Infection from influenza viruses can result in illness ranging from mild to severe and may cause life-threatening complications. Persons with existing medical conditions should consult their health care provider before receiving the influenza vaccine.

For more information on vaccinations, visit MILVAX Agency www.vaccines.mil/, the Vaccines Healthcare Center Network (VHC): www.vhcinfo.org/ CDC www.cdc.gov/vaccines, or visit the ERMC web site at <http://ermc.amedd.army.mil>.