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Flu Vaccine Guidance for Patients with Immune Deficiency

MILWAUKEE, WI – While vaccinations for both the seasonal flu and H1N1 are among the best prevention tools available to prevent complications from the flu, should patients with immune deficiency be given the vaccines?

In general, there are two different types of vaccines. These are usually referred to as live or killed vaccines. Live vaccines contain live bacteria or a virus that has been modified. This means they’ve lost their disease-causing ability or are administered by a route that prevents them from causing clinical disease. Killed vaccines are just what the name says—the bacteria or virus in the vaccine is dead.

The difference between the live and killed vaccines is an important one for those with immune disorders.

Information released today by the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology (AAAAI) recommends that live viral vaccines should not be administered to patients with immunodeficiencies. This includes FluMist®, a live viral intranasal vaccine.

Furthermore, family members or household contacts should not receive a live viral vaccine, as they may transmit the live virus to the immune deficient family member. On the other hand, seasonal influenza and H1N1 killed vaccines should be administered because there is no risk of disease from killed or microbial subunit vaccines in patients with immune deficiency.

“Patients with primary immune deficiency, but not patients with severe T-cell deficiency, should receive the H1N1 vaccine. Although the antibody response may be poor or low, the cell-mediated immune response may be a helpful immune response to the virus,” said AAAAI President-Elect Mark Ballow, MD, FAAAAI.

In addition to the immune deficient patient and his or her household members receiving vaccinations with the killed influenza virus, preventative measures such as hand washing should be practiced. If a family member or household contact begins to have flu symptoms, anti-viral influenza drugs should be made available and taken at the first sign of the symptoms.

According to the National Institutes of Health, it is estimated that each year about 400 children are born in the United States with a serious primary immune deficiency. An immune deficiency results in defects in the body’s ability to fight infections. Primary immune deficiency means that there is an inherited problem with the immune system.

Since these patients have a decreased resistance to infections, they often have repeated infections, or infections that are more severe and cause unexpected complications.

The AAAAI offers a comprehensive library of resources on the novel H1N1 virus—especially as related to allergic diseases—including treatment recommendations, vaccine news, case studies and information for patients. Subscribe to the RSS feed to be notified of the latest updates as they happen.

The AAAAI (www.aaaai.org) represents allergists, asthma specialists, clinical immunologists, allied health professionals and others with a special interest in the research and treatment of allergic and immunologic diseases. Established in 1943, the AAAAI has nearly 6,500 members in the United States, Canada and 60 other countries. To locate an allergist/immunologist, visit the AAAAI Physician Referral Directory at www.aaaai.org/physref.

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