Navy public health experts provide flu vaccine production details

By Hugh Cox, Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center Public Affairs

Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center (NMCPHC) experts underscored the importance of mandatory influenza vaccination Sept. 9 and explained how and why a new vaccine is developed and produced annually.

"Early annual immunization is the best method to help combat the effects of influenza as no two influenza strains are exactly alike," said Cmdr. Chris Clagett, Navy physician and head of NMCPHC preventive medicine.

The Navy's 2010/2011 season's vaccine formulation includes three strains - the H1N1 strain and two seasonal flu strains – and is available in injected and nasal mist versions.

Unlike last year, this year's immunization consists of one vaccine, Clagett said. Two vaccinations were required to immunize against the H1N1 virus and the annual influenza strain in 2009.

Like last year, compliance with Department of Defense (DoD) policy on influenza vaccination is a vital component of force health protection and operational readiness.

"The influenza virus changes in smaller or larger ways that make it appear new to the immune system each season," said Clagett.

These changes mean that a person can be infected with influenza repeatedly, and also a vaccine developed one season is unlikely to be effective the next, given a significant enough change in the virus.

This is different than with most viruses for which a successful immune response to infection or vaccination confers longer lasting immunity. This difference means that influenza vaccines must be manufactured annually to match the major circulating viruses for a particular year.

To determine the best influenza vaccine formulation each season, the World Health Organization (WHO) operates the Global Influenza Surveillance Network (GISN).

Laboratories participating in the GISN routinely take throat and nasal samples from people with influenza symptoms around the world to determine what strains are circulating each year and are most likely to cause disease. WHO evaluates this information to make a recommendation for the upcoming season's flu vaccine.

Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Adm. Gary Roughead receives his annual seasonal flu vaccination from Air Force Capt. Leah Williams at the Pentagon. DoD requires the services ensure that no less than 90 percent of uniformed service members be vaccinated no later than Dec. 1.

U.S. Navy photo by MC1 Tiffini Jones Vanderwyst

The influenza vaccine always contains the three virus strains considered by the WHO to be most significant in terms of illness caused or numbers of people likely to be infected.

Influenza viruses are divided into "A" and "B" types, with influenza "A" viruses typically causing more severe illness. Two of this year's vaccine strains are influenza "A" viruses and the third is an influenza "B" virus. One of the "A" strains comes from the H1N1 subtype.

Despite its best efforts, WHO recommendations are not always a 100 percent guarantee.

"Sometimes, as occurred in 2007, there is not a good match between the WHO recommendations for the vaccine strains and the important circulating viruses," said Clagett. "That mismatch causes that year's vaccine to be less protective than in other years with the consequence that fewer cases of flu are prevented."

As the Navy's leader in disease surveillance, this information is critical for NMCPHC, whose epidemiologic staff spends a considerable amount of time tracking and monitoring the severity of outbreaks throughout the Navy.

DoD policy states that influenza vaccination is mandatory for uniformed and health care personnel who provide direct patient care. It is highly encouraged for all others. Furthermore, DoD requires the services to ensure vaccination of no less than 90 percent of uniformed service members no later than Dec. 1.

For more information on influenza, visit the Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center website at www.nmcphc.med.navy.mil.

USNH Yokosuka prepares student athletes for upcoming season

By Richard McManus, USNH Yokosuka Public Affairs

U.S. Naval Hospital (USNH) Yokosuka Pediatrics Department opened its doors to run a weekend walk-in sports physical clinic for local children and teenagers Aug. 28. More than 20 providers and hospital corpsmen volunteered their Saturday to operate the clinic, which provided a valuable service to the Yokosuka base community.

"We are coming up with new and creative ways to better serve our beneficiaries," said Lt. Cmdr. Ronnie Okialda, USNH Yokosuka Pediatrics Department head. "This is just one way we have found to meet the needs of our patients."

A similar clinic was held earlier this summer. Combined, both clinics allowed 130 sports physicals to be preformed over an eight-hour period which saved 43 and a half regular clinic hours. This allowed other patients to be cared for during regular business hours.

"The sports physical clinic has improved our patient's access to care for routine pediatrics appointments by grouping together many similar exams," said Okialda.

Guidelines and physical forms for the special clinic were established and made available for parents to view and fill out in advance of the actual clinic. This streamlined process maximized efficiencies to make the sometimes lengthy process fast and easy.

Like the core facility in Yokosuka, branch clinics followed suit and ran similar sports physical clinics. Branch Health Clinic (BHC) Iwakuni extended their clinic hours of operation Aug. 26 for that purpose.

"[BHC Iwakuni] clinic completed 25 physicals in just two hours which translates to more than eight hours of regular clinic time open for patient care," said BHC Iwakuni Family Practice Nurse Lt. Sarah Gentry. "The students and parents were very grateful and appreciative."

Anonymous comment cards submitted by student's parents on hand for physicals in Yokosuka expressed their approval of the special Saturday clinic.

"The sports physical clinic is a great thing," said one anonymous comment card. "The staff was very enthusiastic. Thank you so very much for doing this!"

Students and staff alike benefited from the clinic. Most of the seven providers and 15 hospital corpsmen who volunteered at the clinic were normally assigned to other areas of the hospital. Although everyone has the basic skills, a period of instruction on sports physicals was given to the volunteers to make them proficient while assisting with this clinic.

Hospitalman Apprentice Joshua Gayle, a corpsman assigned to the Pediatrics Department was pleased with his experience and how it helped him grow as a professional.

"This was a great team building exercise," said Gayle. Everyone came together; we all knew what to do and got the job done in a safe and efficient manner."

Sports physicals are an important step in the prevention of injury while participating in athletic activities or competitions. However, they are not designed to replace routine medical check-ups. These physical exams take a look at the medical history, medications and any other conditions that may prevent the student from performing athletic activities. Sports physicals are not only a good idea but required annually by the Department of Defense Education Activity for students wishing to participate in school sports and other extracurricular activities.

TRICARE overseas transition letters sent out

By TRICARE Management Activity

Editor's note: TRICARE Prime beneficiaries will receive a letter in the mail that contains a typographical error. It refers to TRICARE Prime beneficiaries as standard beneficiaries. TRICARE Prime beneficiary statuses have not changed and this is simply an error. Please contact the Yokosuka TRICARE Service Center at 243-9528/9832 for more information.

TRICARE beneficiaries living outside of the United States will or may have already received letters updating them on the TRICARE Overseas Program Contract that began Sept. 1. Beneficiaries will receive the letter only if their Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS) address is up-to-date.

Current overseas enrollments in TRICARE Prime, TRICARE Global Remote Overseas and TRICARE Puerto Rico Prime will be maintained under the new contract. There is no need for anyone to re-enroll. In addition to new contract information, the letter will include an updated enrollment card and a TRICARE Overseas Program flyer.

Letters will also be sent to TRICARE Overseas Program Standard users, based on their DEERS address. The letter will inform them on how to access services available to them under the new contract. It will also contain a wallet card with customer service and support contacts.

All TRICARE beneficiaries residing overseas should ensure that their DEERS address is current so they continue to receive important TRICARE information. DEERS addresses can be updated using several methods; DEERS update information is available at www.tricare.mil/DEERS.

For more information about the TRICARE Overseas Program contract, beneficiaries can go to www.tricare.mil/topcontract.

The editor asks:

"***Did you know***, U.S. law (Title 18, U.S Code part I, Chapter 33, Section 701), prohibits photographing or otherwise reproducing or possessing Department of Defense identification cards, Common Access Cards (CAC) or official badges in an unauthorized manner, under penalty of a fine, imprisonment or both?

"So, If you are asked to have your ID card, CAC or badge photocopied in order to receive or purchase a product or service, politely decline and then report the incident to your security office immediately.

"This "did you know," was provided by the CFAY Security Manager, Tara Houlden."