



Tom Barrett  
Mayor

Bevan K. Baker, CHE  
Commissioner of Health

Administration



Frank P. Zeidler Municipal Building, 841 North Broadway, 3rd Floor, Milwaukee, WI 53202-3653

phone (414) 286-3521 fax (414) 286-5990  
web site: [www.milwaukee.gov](http://www.milwaukee.gov)

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**Media Contact: Raquel Madrid**  
**414-286-3175 Office**  
**414-603-3147 Pager**

## **CITY WORKING TO ELIMINATE ADULT IMMUNIZATION DISPARITIES**

### **READII MILWAUKEE GEARS UP FOR EDUCATING ELDERLY ABOUT INFLUENZA AND PNEUMONIA IMMUNIZATIONS**

Milwaukee, WI (July 2004) – Each year, thousands of older adults die from vaccine-preventable diseases such as influenza and pneumococcal pneumonia. Although immunizations are effective, inexpensive and readily available, African American and Hispanic senior citizens still lag behind their white counterparts in protecting themselves through immunization. For more than 18 months, READII Milwaukee has been working with local health care providers, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations and other agencies to promote preventative health care to senior citizens.

READII Milwaukee is the Racial and Ethnic Adult Disparities in Immunization Initiative, a partnership between 14 local community organizations and the City of Milwaukee Health Department. In May 2004, READII Milwaukee received the Award for Community Partnership and Accountability from the Wisconsin Public Health Association for its efforts in promoting public health policy and providing public health education.

“READII has helped raise public awareness in terms of annual influenza shots. But we also need to help seniors understand just how serious pneumococcal illnesses can be, and that they can avoid getting sick by receiving a pneumococcal vaccination at age 65,” said Health Commissioner Bevan K. Baker, CHE.

Seniors age 65 and over account for 90% of flu-related deaths and more than 50% of hospitalizations from influenza and its complications. Approximately 100 million doses of influenza vaccine will be available in the US for the 2004-05 season. This is the largest amount ever produced for distribution in the United States.

MORE

For the first time in 2004-05, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is recommending influenza vaccinations for healthy children 6-23 months of age. Recent studies have shown that children under 2 years of age who contract influenza are more likely than older children to develop complications requiring hospitalization.

"Flu is a preventable disease, with great strides having been made in improving the efficacy and safety of vaccination. Also, unlike last year, there will be an ample supply of flu vaccine available in the community October through mid November," said Paul Biedrzycki, Manager of Disease Control & Prevention. "While flu has not yet arrived, you can lessen your chances of getting the flu and spreading it to others by getting your flu shot early."

In the 2003-04 flu season, 152 flu-related deaths among children under 18 years of age were reported to the CDC. While nearly half of these children had an underlying medical condition, 40% were previously healthy. And only 5 were "adequately" vaccinated.

In addition, only about 38% of healthcare workers are vaccinated against influenza each year. The best time to receive an influenza vaccination is during October and November. But it is still worthwhile to be vaccinated in December or later, or for as long as the flu is in circulation.

Pneumococcal pneumonia continues to pose a serious threat to older adults. Each year, severe pneumococcal diseases strike over 60,000 Americans with a mortality rate approaching 45% among the elderly. The pneumococcal vaccine reduces the risk of severe pneumococcal infections by more than 65%, and fatalities by nearly 50%. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend that all seniors receive a pneumococcal immunization at age 65, and even earlier for those who are immunocompromised. Pneumococcal vaccine is available throughout the year.

READII Milwaukee encourages all health care providers and families to spread the message about adult immunizations to at-risk older adults.

For more information, please contact the City of Milwaukee Health Department at 286-3616 or visit any of the following websites:

<http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/immunization/readii.htm>

<http://www.cdc.gov/nip/specint/readii/default.htm>

<http://www.ci.mil.wi.us/citygov/health/Imm/>

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| <b>WHAT:</b>  | <b>Influenza Kick-off and Public Flu Clinic</b>  |
| <b>WHEN:</b>  | <b>Tuesday, October 5, 2004</b>  |
| <b>TIME:</b>  | <b>10:00 a.m. Press Conference<br/>11:00 a.m. Public Flu Clinic</b>                                |
| <b>WHERE:</b> | <b>Clinton Rose Senior Center<br/>3045 N. Martin Luther King Jr. Drive<br/>Milwaukee, WI 53212</b> |