



NEWS RELEASE

KNOX COUNTY MAYOR MIKE RAGSDALE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Knox County Health Department FluMist Clinics Expanded to Include Younger Children

For the past three years, Knox County Health Department has partnered with Knox County schools to offer free FluMist vaccinations to public and private schools throughout Knox County. This year, KCHD is expanding the influenza prevention program to include Head Start students and daycare centers with more than 50 enrolled children. The expansion is possible because FluMist, an intra-nasal flu vaccine, was approved by the FDA late last year for use in children as young as two years of age.

KCHD's 2008 School FluMist Vaccination Program will kick off with a News Conference on Monday, September 22, 2008 at 10:00 a.m. at Pride and Joy Children's Academy (4418 Kingston Pike). Clinics are scheduled in schools, daycares, and Head Start facilities from Sept. 22 through Oct. 17, 2008. A second round of FluMist clinics will be held between Dec. 2 and 22 to provide a second dose of vaccine required for children under 9 years of age who have never received flu vaccine in the past. KCHD will hold clinics in daycares with more than 50 children enrolled. Facilities with fewer children are asked to direct parents to any Health Department location for the free vaccine. FluMist vaccine is available free to any Knox County resident between the ages of 2 and 19.

"Lowering the eligibility for FluMist from 5 to 2 years of age means we can protect school-aged children *and* their younger siblings," said Dr. Martha Buchanan, Public Health Officer for Knox County. "The positive side effect is more vaccinated children and less flu in the community as a whole."

KCHD has been offering FluMist in schools since 2004. Evidence supports vaccinating children as a way to protect the entire community from influenza. Parents or guardians who want their children to receive protection from flu must sign a consent form. Consent forms and the on-site vaccination schedule are available from schools, daycares and Head Start facilities, online at: www.knoxcounty.org/health/flumist_vaccination/index.php or by calling 211. Home-school parents will also receive information in the mail.

"This is a great benefit to our community, children, teachers and parents in so many ways," Knox County Mayor Mike Ragsdale said. "Besides saving parents the cost of a doctor's visit for vaccinations, minimizing the effects of the flu on our community has a ripple effect. Parents may have fewer lost work days and lost wages due to illness. That's very important in the current economic climate."

Children eligible for the free nasally-administered vaccine must be healthy and between the ages of 2-19. As the name suggests, FluMist vaccine is a mist administered through a flat plastic-tipped syringe gently inserted into each nostril. "Children may feel a light spray, but it's not painful," said Dr. Buchanan.

Over the past 3 years KCHD, working with school health nurses and contract staff, have administered a total of 31,160 flu vaccines, adding up to an average of 45% coverage for school aged children, compared to 29% of the same age group nationally. Influenza usually enters a community through children, and children are known to be the major transmitter of flu to other persons, including those whom are considered to be high risk for complications of flu. In Japan, while they have vaccinating all school-aged children against influenza they saw that overall rates of influenza illness, and death from influenza, significantly declined for all age groups. Similar results have been seen in Texas.

Knox County Health Department is committed to promoting public health practices to safeguard and improve the quality of life for all residents. KCHD offers an array of resources, including medical and dental services, family planning, disease surveillance and control, emergency preparedness, air quality management, environmental services, food preparation oversight in public places, smoking cessation, family violence prevention, worksite wellness, nutritional programs and much more. For more information about Knox County Health Department, visit www.knoxcounty.org/health.

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