Meals-on-Wheels
Immunization Survey Report 2008/2009

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Objective: To evaluate the vaccination coverage of recipients of the Meals-on-Wheels program and provide information and better access to vaccination for adults who fall into high risk categories for influenza, pneumococcal, and zoster vaccination.

Survey Design: A Utah Adult Immunization Coalition (UAIC) subcommittee was formed to increase awareness of zoster and pneumococcal vaccination statewide. The committee prepared and distributed a vaccination survey with additional vaccine information to the Meals-on-Wheels program statewide. The survey was modeled on an annual flu survey that has been conducted for several years by the Weber-Morgan Health Department and the Northern Utah Immunization Coalition (NUIC). The Meals-on-Wheels program serves homebound adults of all ages. However, most recipients are elderly, low income, and likely to have a chronic medical condition, all factors that make them a higher risk group for vaccine preventable disease than the general population. In addition, because the Meals-on-Wheels program is an established statewide program that reaches a very high-risk population, it is an ideal venue for vaccination improvement interventions. The committee obtained a survey that had been developed by the NUIC and modified it to include questions pertaining to pneumococcal and zoster vaccinations. The goals of the survey were: 1) to remind recipients to seek an influenza vaccine; 2) to provide information with regard to two additional vaccines that are recommended for seniors–the zoster and pneumococcal (PPV) vaccines; 3) to assess vaccination coverage rates for influenza, pneumococcal, and zoster vaccines; and 4) to assess whether there are barriers to accessing vaccination in this population.

Methods: The UAIC subcommittee contacted local health department immunization coordinators and regional Meals-on-Wheels coordinators to obtain their participation in the project. Not all regions of the state participated; however, a majority of the districts distributed and returned the surveys. Some health departments also agreed to contact Meals-on-Wheels recipients individually, as needed, to provide them with vaccination. The committee obtained Merck brochures that provide information about influenza, pneumococcal, and zoster vaccination. An information sheet for the pneumococcal and zoster vaccines was attached to the brochure and survey. The font used on the survey and other information was as large as possible to accommodate the elderly population. The surveys and information were distributed to the Meals-on-Wheels coordinators with instructions that the surveys be delivered to the recipients with their meal one day then picked up the next day, once completed. The completed surveys were then forwarded to immunization coordinators and/or back to the Utah Immunization Program.

Results: Nine of the 12 health districts completed the project and returned the surveys. Of the approximately 4,700 surveys distributed, a total of 1,120 (24%) were returned to the Utah Immunization Program.

- Overall statewide totals indicate that 82% of Meals-on-Wheels recipients received a flu shot for the 2007/2008 season, and 80% planned to get a flu vaccination for the 2008/2009 season.

- The means of obtaining vaccination included: A) Home health nurse visited and gave the vaccination; B) Ride from a friend or family member; C) Ride to a drive-by clinic; D) Ride from friend or family to doctor; and E) Other. While responses were fairly evenly distributed among options A-C, only 2% chose option D, while many others wrote in the same response on option E, with the predominant answer being "at the doctor's office".
- Seventy-two percent of those taking the survey had ever received a pneumococcal vaccination. Only 7% reported having received a zoster vaccination.
- Those who reported that they had not received a pneumococcal or zoster vaccination were asked whether they would like to obtain one. Thirty-three percent of this group stated that they would like to get one or both vaccines.
- Finally, when asked whether help was needed in obtaining vaccinations, 25% said they needed help.

The complete survey results appear on the following pages. State, district and regional areas are reported along with the number of surveys from that particular area. Page 4 illustrates comparisons between influenza vaccination coverage among Meals-on-Wheels recipients, influenza and pneumococcal vaccination rates from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System survey (BRFSS) for non-institutionalized adults 65 years of age and older, and from the Long Term Care (LTC) Immunization Report rates for residents.

Conclusion: Vaccination coverage rates for Meals-on-Wheels recipients are significantly higher than both BRFSS rates and Long Term Care Report rates for residents.

- The overall state Meals-on-Wheels coverage rate for influenza vaccination during the 2007/2008 season was 82%, compared to 76% for the 2007 BRFSS influenza vaccination rate and 72% for the 2007 influenza vaccination rate among LTC residents.
- Although the 2008/2009 overall state Meals-on-Wheels influenza coverage rate was a projected number, 80% said that they intended to get the influenza vaccine in 2008 as compared to the 73% coverage rate for the 2008 BRFSS survey and 74% coverage rate for the LTC Immunization Report in 2008.
- The 72% rate reported for pneumococcal vaccination on the Meals-on-Wheels survey is also higher than the 69% pneumococcal vaccination rate for 2008 on the BRFSS surveys. The 72% Meals-on-Wheels pneumococcal vaccination rate is also substantially higher than the 47% rate for LTCs in 2008.
- The 7% coverage rate for zoster vaccine on the Meals-on-Wheels survey is the only measure of zoster vaccination coverage that is presently available.

Although the Meals-on-Wheels recipients surveyed comprise a theoretical subset of the BRFSS group, vaccination rates among Meals-on-Wheels recipients are much higher for influenza and slightly higher for pneumococcal. This is good news, as adults in this group likely are likely to have several factors that put them at high risk for disease.

Vaccination coverage rates for influenza and pneumococcal are higher among the Meals-on-Wheels group than for other identified groups, yet lag behind the national Healthy People 2010 vaccination coverage goal of 90%. The Meals-on-Wheels program can assist in reaching this goal by providing access to needed vaccines. Future surveys and distribution of information may help raise vaccination rates among the Meals-on-Wheels group and track vaccination progress. Tracking zoster vaccination coverage is particularly important since there is no other mechanism for obtaining this rate in Utah at the present time.

Twenty-five percent of the survey respondents indicated that they need help obtaining vaccinations. Establishing this percentage makes it possible to approximate how many Meals-on-Wheels recipients statewide have no access to vaccination. The percentage rate also serves as a baseline for tracking improvement in access over time. In-home vaccination or transportation assistance from local health departments, aging services or other community organizations can reduce or eliminate the barrier. Access was improved in some regions of the state through the collection of contact information on the survey, which was used to make individual vaccination arrangements. Vaccination rates, as well as access to vaccination, might be improved on future surveys by engaging all regions of the state in providing in-home vaccination or transportation assistance. One additional barrier cited on some returned surveys was the inability to afford vaccination. This highlights the need to make low-cost or no-cost vaccinations available to adults who cannot afford them.

The survey itself could be improved by eliminating or abbreviating several questions. Also, separating the question with regard to the desire to receive zoster or pneumococcal vaccination would provide a clearer result. The core influenza and pneumococcal questions are best left as they appear on the first survey in order to provide good comparison data over time. Additionally, efforts to enlist all regions of the state in future projects could help improve vaccination coverage rates statewide and provide more comprehensive vaccination coverage data.