



St. Mary's County Health Department

NEWS RELEASE

www.smchd.org

William B. Icenhower, MD, MPH, Health Officer
21580 Peabody Street,
Leonardtown, MD 20650

Contact: Leslie Payne,
Public Information Officer

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Telephone: 301-475-4318

Fax: 301-475-4350

E-mail: paynel@smhd.com

Elementary-age Children Eligible for Free Flu Vaccination

(LEONARDTOWN, MD) September 22, 2006—Maryland children aged 5 to 11 are eligible to receive a free flu vaccine this fall through a partnership of state and federal government agencies and MedImmune, Inc., the vaccine manufacturer.

The vaccinations will be jointly coordinated by the St. Mary's County Health Department and St. Mary's County Public Schools. Health professionals will administer the vaccine to healthy children **October 10 – 13** at their schools. FluMist®, a vaccine given by nasal spray, will be the primary method of vaccination. Children from non-public schools will also be eligible for the vaccine through the public school system.

Parental consent is required before a child can receive the vaccine through this program. Consent forms and vaccine information will be sent home with children from public schools the last week in September. Non-public school children will also bring a letter home from their schools

(more)

Free flu vaccinations, p. 2

next week.

“Children usually find a nasal vaccine easier to tolerate, since there’s no shot involved and it doesn’t hurt,” said William Icenhower, MD, St. Mary’s County health officer. “And, we know that FluMist® is a well-tested, safe vaccine that is very effective in this age group.” Children who, because of certain medical conditions, are not eligible for FluMist® will be offered the traditional injectable vaccine as an alternative.

Vaccinating the school-aged population is an effective way to reduce the incidence of flu among all age groups in the community, according to recent studies. Children have a higher rate of infection during flu season than adults, and they are often the primary source of infection for other family members. Influenza can be especially dangerous for younger siblings and grandparents, whose immune systems are not as adept at fighting infections.

“By vaccinating children, we will help protect the entire family,” said Maryland’s Department of Health and Mental Hygiene Secretary S. Anthony McCann. “If our children are healthier, they miss less school time, and their parents miss less time from work.”

This statewide initiative builds on a successful pilot program in which FluMist® was administered to children in Calvert and Carroll counties last year. About 555,000 children in Maryland are eligible to receive the vaccine this year.

(more)

Free flu vaccinations, p. 3

“This one-time program provides us with an opportunity to raise awareness of the importance of vaccinating children as a way to control the spread of influenza,” said Governor Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr. “We hope this program will encourage parents to have their children vaccinated every year.”

For more information on the FluMist® vaccination schedule or St. Mary’s County’s 2006 flu clinic schedule, call 301-475-4330.

###

