



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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CHHS SECRETARY ISSUES STATEMENT ON AVAILABILITY OF MERCURY-FREE FLU VACCINE

S. KIMBERLY BELSHE □
SECRETARY

SACRAMENTO – Kim Belshé, secretary of the California Health and Human Services Agency, today issued the following statement regarding her decision to issue an exemption allowing the use of influenza vaccine containing mercury for children under age 3 for up to six weeks. Pursuant to AB 2943 (Chapter 837, Statutes of 2004), the Legislature allowed for an exemption to the law so parents have options for vaccination during times of short supply, if desired.

Agency
Departments &
Boards:

“The Administration is committed to implementing AB 2943 and ensuring that pregnant women and children have access to mercury-free vaccines. However, the health threat that seasonal influenza presents is severe and all too often deadly. Given the real constraints on availability of mercury-free seasonal flu vaccine, we feel it is important to offer this short-term alternative to parents and health care providers in order to ensure young children are protected from the potentially severe effects of the flu.

Aging

“California is experiencing a temporary shortage of mercury-free flu vaccine because the only manufacturer of the vaccine in a formulation that meets California’s new mercury standard for children under age 3 has a delay in shipment. We anticipate sufficient mercury-free vaccines will be available within six weeks; however, while waiting for this supply, we could lose the opportunity to vaccinate young children.

Alcohol and
Drug Programs

“The American Academy of Pediatrics, California Medical Association, California Academy of Family Physicians and Kaiser Permanente have all called for this exemption because the delay in supply is creating a dangerous situation for our youngest children. Further, these groups, representing physicians who care for children, have well-founded concerns that some parents do not have the option to delay vaccination because of personal barriers, like access to transportation.

Child Support
Services

“Each year, approximately 36,000 people in the United States die from influenza and its complications and at least 200,000 are hospitalized. During the 2004 flu season, more than 150 children in the U.S. died from influenza and many more were hospitalized as a result of complications. No other vaccine-preventable disease kills more people in this country.

Community Services
and Development

“We take very seriously the expressed concerns that mercury in vaccines causes autism and remain committed to full implementation of AB 2943. The manufacturers are also taking this concern seriously and are building new production plants to process mercury-free vaccines. As we move into the flu season, given that the risks of influenza exceed risk from mercury in this vaccine, I am exercising my authority to temporarily exempt the influenza vaccine for children under age 3 from the provisions of AB 2943 for a maximum six-week period. This action is based upon a temporary shortage of mercury-free influenza vaccine and the public health necessity of continuing to allow young children to receive this vaccine. The Governor concurs with my exemption determination.

Developmental
Services

“We encourage health care professionals to first use any available mercury-free vaccine during this exemption period. We urge those providers offering vaccines containing mercury to discuss options with parents before administering the vaccine.

Emergency Medical
Services Authority

“I strongly urge parents to consult with their health care providers about vaccinating their children against influenza. October through December is the best time to get vaccinated because the annual flu season usually peaks in January or February.”

Health Services

Managed Risk
Medical Insurance

Mental Health

Rehabilitation

Social Services

Statewide Health
Planning and
Development

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