

## Most Cancer Patients Don't Get Flu Shots

BY PATRICE WENDLING  
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STOCKHOLM — Vaccination coverage for very severe manifestations of influenza remains low in patients with cancer, even though they are at high risk.

Just 34% of 112 consecutive cancer patients receiving treatment at the Hôpital Cochin, Paris, also received flu shots in 2008. Of these, 14% had chemotherapy as their only indication for vaccination, and 44% had other indications such as bronchopathy and diabetes.

The main reasons for absence of vaccination were lack of prompting by the treating physician (72%), fear of side effects (33%), and concerns about vaccine effica-



**Oncologists should be more aware of the necessity to vaccinate patients who have cancer.**

DR. LOULERGUE

cy (10%), Dr. Pierre Loulergue reported in an award-winning poster at the European Society of Medical Oncology Congress.

General practitioners administered the flu shots in 56% of vaccinated patients. "The GP could do 100% of vaccinations," Dr. Loulergue said in an interview. "But the oncologist must be more aware of the necessity to vaccinate."

Dr. Loulergue said if cancer patients have influenza, the consequences can be more severe and can delay chemotherapy. Guidelines in France and in the United States recommend vaccination against influenza in all immunocompromised patients. However, the leading reason cited by oncologists for not giving the flu shot was the lack of awareness of recommendations.

In a previous study, one-third of 214 radiotherapy patients (aged 50 years or older) at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, said they never had an annual flu shot. Only 7% said a cancer specialist discussed vaccinations with them, compared with 44% of general practitioners (FAMILY PRACTICE NEWS, Dec. 1, 2007, p. 18).

Studies have also suggested lower influenza vaccination immunogenicity in chemotherapy patients, Dr. Loulergue said. The investigators hope to address immunogenicity in a follow-up study.

In the current study, patients (aged 16-87 years) had received chemotherapy for a median time of 7 months (range, 1-41 months). Indications included colorectal (21%), lung (16%), prostate (15%), sarcoma (8%), and urothelial (7%) cancer.

Vaccinated patients were significantly older than those not vaccinated (70 vs. 59 years) and were more likely to have received a vaccination voucher from the French national health insurance agency (71% vs. 36%). The researchers reported no conflicts of interest. ■

## Immunization Rates Continue to Increase

BY DIANA MAHONEY  
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**M**ore than three-quarters of the nation's young children have been immunized with the full series of childhood vaccines recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Data from the 2007 National Immunization Survey showed that all but one vaccine in the recommended series—the fourth dose of the DTaP vaccine—

reached 90% coverage last year, as did the varicella vaccine and the third dose of the seven-valent pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV7), both for the first time, Dr. Julie Gerberding, director of the CDC, reported in a media briefing on the survey results.

In addition, fewer than 1% of the more than 17,000 children born between January 2004 and July 2006 represented in the survey had not received any vaccines in the recommended series by ages 19-35 months, and there

were no statistically significant decreases in individual vaccine coverage from 2006 to 2007 (MMWR 2008;57:961-6).

The survey provides coverage estimates for the 4:3:1:3:3:1 immunization series for children aged 19-35 months that includes vaccines for diphtheria, tetanus, and acellular pertussis (DTaP); poliovirus; measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR); *Haemophilus influenzae* type b; hepatitis B; and varicella.

The coverage rates are indicative of



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