



STATE OF MARYLAND

DHMH PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DHMH Wins National Award for Immunization Program *Maryland is first to spearhead statewide initiative to vaccinate children*

BALTIMORE, MD (March 5, 2007) -- A unique initiative among public, private and community sectors to create a school-based vaccination program has resulted in a national award for the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH).

The state health department was presented today with the National Influenza Vaccine Summit's *Overall 2006-07 Season Activity* award for its "innovative and collaborative approach" to vaccinate school-aged children aged five to 11 for seasonal flu. The project was also noted as a valuable preparation tool for a possible influenza pandemic.

The recognition took place during the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention's (CDC) National Immunization Conference in Kansas City.

"Maryland is the first state to reach out to this age group with a statewide influenza vaccination program," said DHMH Secretary John M. Colmers. "This award is acknowledgment of all of the hard work performed by health and school officials at the local level and by our community partners to make this campaign a success."

The innovative and collaborative program enabled more than 50,000 school children to receive FluMist® vaccine at no cost to their families. DHMH, CDC and Gaithersburg-based MedImmune, Inc., each contributed doses to immunize the students.

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The program was implemented with the support of Maryland's 24 local health departments, the state's 24 local school systems and other key partners, such as the community-based Maryland Partnership for Prevention and the Maryland chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. The local health departments and school systems provided staff and other in-kind support to help implement the campaign.

"With the help of our partners, we were able to establish nearly 200 clinic dates in schools and non-traditional settings to provide vaccine to students with parental consent," said Greg Reed, program manager of the DHMH Center for Immunizations. "We are hopeful that healthier children and reduced school absenteeism encourages parents to have their children vaccinated every year."

This one-time initiative was based on a pilot program conducted by the department during the 2005 - 2006 flu season in Calvert and Carroll counties. The result was a demonstrated decrease in student and staff absenteeism due to influenza-like illnesses.

The program has drawn the attention of public health officials from other states, including Colorado, Hawaii and Pennsylvania. A formal evaluation and analysis of the DHMH campaign is expected to be complete this fall.

The *Overall 2006-07 Season Activity* award is one of three that the vaccine summit uses to recognize individuals and organizations that have made extraordinary contributions towards improved adult and/or childhood influenza vaccination rates within their communities. The other categories are *Healthcare Worker Campaign* and *Late Season Activities*.

The National Influenza Vaccine Summit, started in 2000, is co-sponsored by the American Medical Association and CDC. The summit is comprised of more than 400 members who represent over 100 public and private organizations. The summit's Web site is www.preventinfluenza.org.

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