

High-dose flu vaccine reducing hospitalizations

PORTLAND — High-dose influenza vaccine reduces hospitalization for the virus among Oregon seniors, a new Oregon Health Authority study has found.

The study of more than 144,000 seniors, ages 65 and older, living in the Portland metropolitan area showed that high-dose flu vaccine was 31 percent more effective at preventing senior flu-related hospitalizations than the standard-dose flu vaccine during the 2016-2017 season, according to the study appearing in the scientific journal *Vaccine*.

A high-dose vaccine contains four times the antigen of a standard flu vaccine. Antigens are the molecular structures on the surfaces of viruses that trigger the body's immune response. Seniors typically have a weaker immune response to standard influenza vaccines than younger adults, and benefit from vaccines that are high-dose or "adjuvanted" specifically for seniors.

Putting another chemical, an adjuvant, into the vaccine helps create a stronger reaction to the antigen of the vaccine. Seniors should get a vaccine that is intended to boost their immune response.

Steve Robison, epidemiologist in the Oregon Immunization Program, is the lead study author. Co-author is Anne Thomas, M.D., public health physician in the Acute and Communicable Disease Prevention Section. They say protecting vulnerable seniors during flu season each year is a constant challenge.

"Seniors are at greater risk of severe illness from flu," Thomas said. "What's more, typical flu vaccine doses aren't adequately protective

for many seniors. We wanted to know whether a widely used high-dose flu vaccine would benefit a large population of seniors, particularly in reducing hospitalizations."

For their study, Robison and Thomas focused on seniors who reported receiving a flu vaccine by December 11, 2016, which is roughly four weeks before the typical onset of substantial local flu disease activity. It also ensured that seniors who received the vaccine had enough time to achieve full "seroconversion," which is when flu antibodies develop and become detectable.

The study population consisted of 78,602 seniors who received high-dose flu vaccine and 65,705 seniors who received the standard vaccine dose.

Robison and Thomas found that senior use of high-dose flu vaccine, compared with standard-dose vaccine, was associated with a "substantial reduction in the risk of hospitalization" with laboratory-confirmed influenza.

"The message is: do not give the standard flu vaccine to seniors. Give the high-dose vaccine or adjuvanted vaccine," Robison said. He said that while the adjuvanted vaccine was not addressed in the study, it also is a good alternative to the standard-dose vaccine for seniors.

Robison explained that because adult influenza is not a reportable disease in the United States, only limited data on actual amounts of disease exist. However, due to funding from CDC's Emerging Infections Program, the OHA's Acute and Communicable Disease Prevention program tracks influenza hospitalizations in the Portland metro area.

LETTERS

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To the Editor:

I'd like to start by thanking those of you who shared your appreciation of last month's letter and in honor of the Thanksgiving holiday, I would like to share a few things that I am thankful for this November.

Even though enrollment is down two students this month, it is still above our projected enrollment for the start of the year. The past two years, we have started below our projection, so starting above is evidence of the growth that is happening in Sisters Country. I am thankful to see the growth in our schools.

I am thankful to a great staff. The Sisters School District At-A-Glance Profiles were released by the state and English, math, and science scores are up throughout the district. Our third-grade language arts scores are 17% above the state average. At Sisters Middle School our language arts scores are 12% above the state average and science is 26 percent above the state average. At the High School, our freshman "on track" rate improved to nearly 90 percent, and our graduation rate is up.

I am thankful for a supportive community. We have many great partners as well as a community that has supported us with both a facilities and a local option bond. The community not only values a strong school system, they get involved as partners and volunteers that support the many experiential learning opportunities for our students.

Please note the next board meeting is December 12 at 5 p.m. in the District office. These are public meetings and offer a great way to see how our students, staff, administrators, volunteers and community members all come together to make our District one of the best in Oregon!

Curt Scholl, SSD Superintendent

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To the Editor:

The *Central Oregon Rancher Magazine* is hosting an event November 20 in Prineville titled "Log It, Graze It or Watch It Burn. The Solution." Their intention is to get together and solve the problem of catastrophic fires in our forests. All solutions and input from the public will be hand-delivered to elected officials in Washington, DC. (Isn't it kind of cute how some people still have faith that the Trump administration could actually fix something?) Not surprisingly, their announcement makes no mention of climate change, the most significant factor behind these monster fires.

Thinking that solving the forest-fire problem by simply logging it or thinning excessive fuel load ignores the fact that the slash left over can create its own problems. In Paradise, some researchers found that logging in a burned area after a fire in 2008, intending to clear out fuels and make that area safer, may have had the opposite effect because of fast-burning weeds and young trees that allowed the fire to spread even more rapidly.

One partial solution would be to stop subsidizing the oil, gas and coal industries (and grazing). The fossil fuel companies get corporate welfare to the tune of \$14.7 billion from the federal government and \$5.8 billion in state-level incentives for a total of \$20.5 billion annually. This is a conservative estimate based solely on production subsidies — taxpayer money that goes directly to producing more fossil fuels.

We should be subsidizing sustainable resource companies like wind and solar and small-diameter wood utilization for use as bio-fuels instead of fossil fuels as energy sources. Marketable biofuels would not only help to reduce fuel loads and create jobs but would help to slow down our use of fossil fuels, a necessity in the ongoing effort to combat climate change.

Terry Weygandt

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