Michigan Connects Public Health and Healthcare Providers to Protect Communities from Influenza

The Michigan Department of Community Health is using a variety of tactics to protect communities from the flu by connecting public health and healthcare providers.

In the United States, influenza is estimated to cause 23,600 deaths on average, 200,000 hospitalizations,¹ and a national economic burden of 87.1 billion dollars annually.² Flu prevention is always changing, so it is important for healthcare providers and public health to be closely connected and up to date on influenza. New flu vaccine products are emerging and create an opportunity to prevent illness and death through increased vaccine and appropriate antiviral use. Michigan Department of Community Health (MDCH) is keeping public health and healthcare providers connected through a variety of tactics including an annual flu webinar, support from local health department immunization nurses who serve as local liaisons to providers, a series of regional immunization conferences, and a communications channel reaching over 8,000 providers which is maintained via contract with the Michigan State Medical Society. These efforts help disseminate current information about the flu, obtain provider input on the development of prevention strategies, and help establish public health as a credible information source for the prevention and treatment of influenza.

Steps Taken:

- Since 2012, MDCH has held a widely publicized flu webinar in advance of flu season. Led by Michigan’s flu epidemiologist and immunization nurse educator, the one hour online webinar is accessible to a wide array of providers across the state, including doctors, nurses, auxiliary healthcare providers, pharmacists, and infection control nurses. Specific webinar topics include flu season recommendations, information on newly available vaccines, strategies to increase immunization levels, information on flu vaccine storage and handling, and sharing of current surveillance data. The webinar offers opportunities for questions and discussion and allows the state to hear input on current efforts. Continuing medical education is provided to a variety of healthcare professionals who attend the webinar.

- MDCH publicizes the webinar through numerous channels, including a listserv maintained through a contract with the Michigan State Medical Society. In addition, MDCH advertises the webinar in newsletters and through local health department community contacts.

- MDCH supports a network of local health immunization nurses and staff across the state, which allows MDCH to disseminate information shared in the webinar and any other information throughout the flu season. Among other responsibilities, these individuals serve as community liaisons with local healthcare providers on flu and other vaccine preventable diseases.
Each fall, MDCH hosts eight regional immunization conferences for healthcare providers across the state. The conferences include immunization updates and training, in addition, the immunization disparities workgroup uses these events to highlight health equity issues related to immunization and the flu.

MDCH publishes a weekly newsletter, *Flu Focus*, with surveillance updates, new, and resources.

As part of the Michigan Care Improvement Registry, the Influenza Vaccine Exchange Network allows providers to share information on inventory facilitating redistribution of vaccine during times of vaccine shortage.

Through partnerships and events, MDCH has built a statewide network of physician peer educators to extend information dissemination and provide field-based input.

**Results:**

- In 2013, 340 clinical providers from across Michigan attended the flu webinar. Webinar content is well received by the healthcare community.
- The fall conference series reaches nearly 2,000 healthcare providers each year.
- The listserv, maintained by the Michigan State Medical Society, reaches over 9,000 healthcare professionals across the state.
- This MDCH partnership has resulted in over 1,200 providers now utilizing the state’s immunization registry, including entry of flu vaccine data. Pharmacies are especially supportive and the Michigan Pharmacy Association has passed a resolution to promote full use of the state registry for collection of immunization data.

**Lessons Learned:**

- Establishing regular and open communication channels to disseminate up-to-date information and engage healthcare providers in flu prevention efforts can enhance patient care and help guide the development of broader public health initiatives. Regular communication with partners is beneficial when other emerging public health issues come up, because we already have those networks of partners activated.
- Working with local health nurses can expand outreach and information dissemination within communities.
- Efforts to build partnerships and enhance provider communications around seasonal flu builds readiness for pandemics. These partnerships can build trust in advance of a disaster as communication channels are established, maintained, and exercised through regular use and public health is established as a credible and accessible source of information on influenza.

**Funding:**

Federal funding was used in part for the staff working on this project, including Immunization 317 funding, Immunization Cooperative Agreement funding, and preparedness funding.
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