Dear Colleague:

The 2020–21 influenza season is quickly approaching, though the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic continues to impact the health of Floridians. Influenza activity levels remained low throughout the summer months but are expected to increase as we head into the fall. The Florida Department of Health recommends that people who are able to get vaccinated do so now.

We urge you to actively recommend and offer influenza vaccine to your pregnant and postpartum patients:

- **Influenza is five times more likely to cause severe illness in pregnant women compared to women who are not pregnant.**
  - Changes in immune, heart, and lung functions during pregnancy increase the risk of severe complications from influenza infection, even in generally healthy pregnant women.
  - Pregnant women with certain underlying medical conditions, including asthma and heart disease, are at even greater risk for severe complications from influenza.
- **Studies have shown that pregnant women who receive a recommendation and offer of vaccination by their health care providers were over six times more likely to get vaccinated compared to women who did not receive a vaccination recommendation or offer.** For more information on making a strong influenza vaccine endorsement, please visit: [www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/vaccination/flu-vaccine-recommendation.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/vaccination/flu-vaccine-recommendation.htm).
- **Inactivated influenza vaccines are safe, provide the best protection for pregnant women and their fetuses, and are indicated at any time during pregnancy.**
  - Vaccination during pregnancy provides maternal antibody protection to infants too young to be vaccinated for influenza.
  - Vaccination during pregnancy has been shown to protect pregnant women from influenza hospitalizations and preterm birth.
  - Though getting an influenza vaccine will not protect against COVID-19, it is more important this season than previous seasons to help reduce burden on the health care system and to protect vulnerable populations, such as pregnant women.
- **Early treatment with antivirals for influenza infection is especially important for pregnant women.**
  - Antiviral treatment is recommended as early as possible for pregnant or postpartum (within two weeks of delivery) women with confirmed or suspect influenza. Delayed antiviral treatment (longer than two days) has been associated with increased risk of severe outcomes, such as hospitalization and death.
- **Influenza vaccination is also critical for postpartum women and caretakers of children under 6 months of age to prevent transmission of influenza to infants who are too young to be vaccinated.**
You play a crucial role in helping to prevent influenza and its severe complications in your patients and their infants. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends influenza vaccination be offered by October, but stresses vaccination should continue throughout the season as long as influenza viruses are circulating (even into January). Influenza seasons can vary dramatically in timing, with peak activity observed as late as March in recent seasons in Florida. Seasonal influenza circulation patterns sometimes differ in Florida compared to the rest of the nation. Please visit FloridaHealth.gov/FloridaFlu for additional information and subscribe to Florida Health’s weekly influenza report, the Florida Flu Review, for regular updates.

If your practice did not order or does not offer influenza vaccine, we ask that you help refer patients to get immunization for their children and families: FloridaHealth.gov/findaflushot. Children can often be the source of infection for influenza among pregnant women and their infants. More information can be found at www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/vaccination/ and www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/vaccine/pregnant.htm?s_cid=PN-NICRD-Maternal-FluVax-AW-AllGroups-OY2FluSearch-Flu2.

If you have questions about other respiratory diseases, including COVID-19, please contact your local county health department (FloridaHealth.gov/CHDEpiContact) for the most up-to-date guidance. Thank you for your important contribution to protecting Floridians from influenza!

Sincerely,

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Director
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State Epidemiologist

CB/kk