

# HEALTH REPORT

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## CDC COMMITTEE ATTEMPTS TO REQUIRE FLU VACCINATIONS FOR ALL U.S. CHILDREN

The worst fears of an organization that recently protested mandatory influenza immunizations for children in New Jersey seem about to come to fruition. The group's concern was that mandatory vaccination legislation enacted in their state would put similar laws on the fast track for enactment in other states across the United States. This hunch is on its way to becoming reality now that a committee of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently made their recommendation on childhood vaccinations.

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) advises the CDC on vaccination issues. This panel voted at their February 2008 meeting in Atlanta, Georgia, to expand annual influenza vaccinations to include all children in the U.S. from 6 months through 18 years of age. This recommendation would increase the number of children expected to receive a flu vaccination annually by approximately 30 million.

Recently, New Jersey became the first state to require mandatory flu vaccinations for preschool-aged children. The state passed a law that all children enrolling in preschools and in public schools must show evidence that flu shots were administered. At the time, several organizations including the New Jersey Alliance for Informed Choice in Vaccination vehemently opposed the enforced legislation. They stated that it was their fear that what happened in New Jersey would be used as a model by the CDC to impose enforced flu vaccinations on children around the country.

The ACIP is now moving this agenda forward with their recommendation to the director of the CDC to make flu vaccinations mandatory for all children over 6 months old in the United States. The committee is basing their rationale on studies that have shown that healthy children bear a significant burden from influenza disease and are at an increasing risk of needing influenza-related medical care. In addition, they point to evidence that reducing influenza transmission among children has the potential to reduce influenza among their household contacts and within the community.

"This new recommendation should reduce the risk of influenza infections among children of all ages, and their consequent need for medical visits and missed time from school," said Dr. Anne Schuchat, director of CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases. "This new recommendation will help parents understand that all children can benefit from vaccination and further encourages providers to start vaccination of children through 18 next year."

If the recommendations are implemented as expected, they should to be put into place as soon as possible according to the committee's urging, but no later than the 2009-2010 influenza season. Obviously, this proposition on mandatory vaccinations to children is as ridiculous as it is dangerous for our future generation.