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## ***Pandemic Influenza Q & A for Immunosuppressed Persons***

### **Q: What is an immunosuppressed person?**

A: An immunosuppressed person is anyone who is on cancer therapy which suppresses the immune system, is taking medication after a transplant to prevent rejection, is infected with Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV – the virus that causes AIDS), is taking immunosuppressive medication for another disease, or has a defect of their immune system.

### **Q: What can immunosuppressed people do to help protect themselves from pandemic influenza?**

A: All of the same protective measures recommended for the general population are also recommended for immunosuppressed people. People with suppressed immunity to diseases should protect themselves by not going places where there are crowds such as sporting events, crowded grocery stores or malls, and churches and schools. They should also avoid contact with anyone sneezing or coughing.

### **Q: Should an immunosuppressed person receive the inactivated influenza vaccine?**

A: Influenza vaccination is the first line of defense against influenza. However, there is currently no vaccine available against any future pandemic influenza strain. We will not know what strain of influenza virus will cause pandemic influenza until the pandemic starts. After the strain is identified it will take at least 6 months to develop vaccine, so a vaccine will not be available during the early parts of a pandemic. It is recommended that you take the pandemic strain influenza vaccine when it becomes available for your use.

### **Q: Are there immunosuppressed people who should NOT receive the inactivated influenza vaccine?**

A: Anyone, including immunosuppressed people, who has a history of severe allergy (i.e., anaphylactic allergic reaction) to hens' eggs, or a history of onset of Guillain-Barre syndrome during the 6 weeks after vaccination should not receive the inactivated influenza vaccine (flu shot).

### **Q: What other issues should be considered?**

A: Immunosuppressed people may have a poor response to immunization. Therefore, the use of antiviral medications for prevention (if they are available) should be considered if an immunosuppressed person is likely to be exposed to people with influenza.