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Department of Health Announces Efforts To Reduce Mercury In Flu Shots

(Santa Fe) – Health Secretary Michelle Lujan Grisham announced today that the Department of Health, with partners from the medical community, will move ahead with responsible health policy that protects children's health by increasing the number of immunizations and reducing mercury exposure in flu vaccines.

The Department of Health continues to support reducing exposure to thimerosal in flu vaccine. However, there was misunderstanding that a recent legislative proposal was proposing an outright ban on thimerosal. This was never the case. The department has worked hard to stress the importance of making flu shots as safe as possible while ensuring an adequate supply of vaccine.

"Our first priority has always been getting children immunized in the safest way possible," Grisham said. "This partnership between the department and the medical community is a recognition of how we can work together to improve the health of New Mexicans."

The New Mexico Pediatric Society and the Clinical Prevention Initiative, which includes the New Mexico Medical Society, major health providers and payers in New Mexico, have agreed to work with the department to ensure that people who need flu shots will get them and to make thimerosal-free shots the first preference for young children and pregnant women.

"The Medical Society looks forward to collaborating with the Department of Health through the Clinical Prevention Initiative to improve immunization rates and work toward mercury-free flu vaccines for children and pregnant women," said Randy Marshall, executive director of New Mexico Medical Society.

The department has pre-ordered 155,000 doses of flu vaccine for the next flu season, about 26,000 more than it distributed during the 2005-2006 flu season. Of the department's total order, 60,000 doses contain no thimerosal preservative. The preservative-free order is intended as additional vaccine supply for children up to age 8 and pregnant women.

Health departments and medical providers across the country order flu vaccine from manufacturers before they make the vaccine. Orders aren't final until manufacturers successfully produce the vaccines.

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