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Influenza Vaccination in the Emergency Department

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Objectives: This study was designed to look at the possible benefits of administering the influenza vaccine in the emergency department (ED), and to determine if the side-effect profile is similar to that seen nationally.

Background: Influenza is a common and life-threatening illness, responsible for 114,000 hospitalizations and 36,000 deaths each year in the United States. Treatment of influenza is largely supportive and ineffective, but immunization is highly effective in preventing both morbidity and mortality. While ED patients frequently meet the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines for vaccination, the influenza vaccine is rarely administered in the ED.

Methods: A convenience sample of ED patients who met the 2007 CDC guidelines for immunization were approached and asked to participate in a research study of the influenza vaccine. Participants were offered the Sanofi-Pasteur inactivated intramuscular influenza vaccine. Acceptance and declination rates were determined. Adverse reactions were assessed at two days by telephone call.

Results: Seventy patients were offered the vaccine and 60 accepted (85.72%). At the two-day follow up, 39 out of 47 patients who were reachable reported no adverse reactions to the vaccine. Reported reactions included: fever on the day of vaccination (1), soreness at injection site (1), swollen eyes (1), mild tingling (1), myalgias (1), and severe shoulder soreness(1). Each adverse reaction was reported in 2.13% of patients.

Conclusions: Our results indicate that influenza vaccine is accepted at a high rate when offered to patients in the ED as part of standard care (85.72%). Adverse reactions were minimal, occurring in 17.02% in these patients. Patients will likely benefit from vaccination for influenza in the ED as it will minimize their risk of contracting influenza or complications from influenza, as well as the risk of transmitting it to others.