Rhode Island Flu Task Force

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Rhode Island Department of Health

• Formed in August 2011
• Approximately 50 members
• Epidemiologists, physicians, nurses, public health professionals, pharmacists, insurers, college and university personnel, nursing home staff, and healthcare facility administrators
Mission

Identify barriers and improving access to influenza vaccine for all Rhode Islanders.

The Rhode Island situation

Healthcare worker flu vaccination rate in Rhode Island – 65%

How can we ask Rhode Islanders to follow the flu vaccination recommendations of their healthcare providers when healthcare providers themselves are not being vaccinated?
Drafting of regulations

• Task Force and Department legal team decide to use regulations
• Draft regulations
• Hold public hearings
  Two public hearings held – July and September 2012

Obstacles

• Definitions
• Lawsuit from the ACLU
Response

• Task Force and department meet to devise response
• Regulations amended to include masking provision
• Lawsuit dropped

Regulations promulgated

Healthcare workers can:
• Be vaccinated against influenza
• Have a medical exemption
• Not be vaccinated, but wear a surgical mask during widespread influenza
Regulations promulgated

- Vaccination deadline - December 15
- Facilities report electronically
- Healthcare workers not in compliance subject to $100 fines; possible finding of unprofessional conduct

Regulations in place

- December 5, 2012 – influenza widespread in Rhode Island
- No complaints filed against any healthcare worker for failing to wear a mask
Results

• A 22% increase in the immunization rate of healthcare workers from the previous season (65% vs. 87%)
• A 10% increase in the immunization rate of the general public from the previous season

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