



## NYS AAP - Chapter 2

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### RE: INFLUENZA VACCINE FOR DETAINED MIGRANT CHILDREN

Dear Representative,

On behalf of the 1,500 members of the New York State American Academy of Pediatrics (NYS AAP) - Chapter 2, the Long Island Chapter, we are writing to request your intervention on the current administration's refusal to provide influenza vaccine to parents and children currently being held in United State Detention facilities.

As pediatricians, we understand the potential seriousness of influenza infection. Since the onset of influenza season last October, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) estimate up to 42.9 million people have contracted flu-like illnesses, creating 20.1 million medical visits, 647,000 hospitalizations and approximately 60,000 deaths (1, 2). The disease is more fatal in young children, as infants less than 6 months of age have the highest mortality rate from influenza (3). The 2017-18 influenza season killed ~175 children across the county and was one of the worst on record (4).

Influenza vaccine is extremely safe and effective in preventing influenza and its complications. While the degree of protection conferred by the vaccine varies annually, in most years, seasonal influenza vaccine reduces the risk of contracting influenza by 60%. Vaccinated patients who contract influenza have milder disease, as immunization confers an additional 60% protection against hospitalization in patients who contract the disease (5). For these reasons, the CDC recommends universal influenza immunization each year.

Conditions in detention facilities place migrant detainees at high risk for all transmissible diseases. Crowded conditions and long periods in these accommodations have already led to outbreaks of scabies, chickenpox, mumps, shingles and lice (6). A report from the United States Inspector General's office specifically noted the crowded conditions would enable disease transmission (7). Of the children who have died in detention, the deaths of at least 5 were attributed to complications from influenza (8).

For this reason, our colleagues at the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health and at Harvard Medical School wrote to Congressional leaders asking for both a Congressional Investigation into the decision-making process related to healthcare issues at these centers and immediate administration of influenza vaccine when available to detainees (9).

In a statement released by United States Customs and Border Protection (CBP) last week, the agency explained the denial of this routine, preventive care immunization by noting influenza vaccine requires several days to create immunity, and that most detainees are not held in custody long enough to medically justify flu vaccination. However, this is neither consistent with current information about migrant detainees nor with data on onset of protection created after influenza immunization.

Information from the CBP, as reported in the *New York Times* and on National Public Radio, indicate that almost half of the ~8,000 migrant detainees are held beyond 3 days, and over 1,500 are held in these centers for at least 10 days (6, 10). Influenza vaccine requires 10-14 days to be effective (1).

In light of the recipe for a public health disaster created by the combination of crowded conditions, long durations of stay, and the refusal to offer protective vaccination, we are asking you to join with your colleagues Representatives Rosa DeLauro and Lucille Roybal-Allard in condemning this action in the most vocal terms and joining their request to provide the needed immunizations to detainees prior to the onset of this year's influenza season, which traditionally begins in October.

We are further asking you to petition CBP to provide influenza immunization directly or allow one of several other capable government agencies to administer the vaccine. This would provide children in detention the same standard of medical care provided to inmates in the federal penitentiary system and to enemy combatants. Without access to appropriate preventive health care, including influenza vaccine, it is only a matter of time before more deaths of detained children occur.

On behalf of our 1,500 members located across Nassau and Suffolk Counties, as well as the boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens, we thank you for all you do for children and remain available to you should you require further information about this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Shah', with a horizontal line underneath.

Shetal I. Shah, MD, FAAP  
President, NYS AAP - Chapter 2

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