

Assessing the Acceptability and Feasibility of a School-Located Vaccination for Influenza Program in Elementary Schools

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Background

Annual influenza vaccination, recommended for all children 6 months to 18 years, is most commonly received in primary care practices. With vaccination now recommended for all children, providers may not have the capacity to accommodate demand. Schools provide an alternative setting for influenza vaccination.

This study was part of a larger study of school-located vaccination for influenza (SLV-I) that randomized elementary schools by:

- intervention group (no SLV-I, SLV-I)
- intensity of parent notification (high, low)
- stratified by location (urban, suburban)

Schools were located in Monroe County, NY (pop. 744,322)

21 schools participated each year of the program:

A mass vaccinator was utilized to administer seasonal influenza vaccines within the schools and bill insurers

Seasonal influenza vaccine clinics were conducted from 11/3/09-12/18/09, and 11/02/10-11/18/10

Objectives of current study:

To qualitatively assess

- the acceptability and feasibility of SLV-I
- the experiences of school staff and the vaccine team who participated in various roles over the two years of the project

Methods

Subjects:

Fourteen individuals, representing four categories of stakeholders, were interviewed upon completion of the second year of the program (March – April, 2011) :

- principals (n=5)
- school nurses (n=5)
- district administrators (n=2)
- mass vaccinator lead personnel (n=2)

School principals and nurses directly involved with SLV-I were randomized from four categories of schools based on location (urban, suburban) and intensity of parent notification (high, low)

Procedure:

- semi-structured interviews conducted from by experienced communications researcher not directly involved with SLV-I implementation
- interviews conducted by telephone (Telespan®), recorded, transcribed and deidentified by independent contractor

Data analysis:

- content analysis began with thorough review of transcripts; researcher team discussed and agreed to identified codes
- all codes entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and compared within and across stakeholder groups
- Emerging categories and themes reviewed and revised iteratively by researcher team

Results

From the school staff perspective, the benefits of vaccination outweighed any inconvenience or interference with regular school activities.

"I think since we had [SLV-I] and some other prevention initiatives, that our incidence of absence from influenza has decreased, so that's enough in itself for me."
– school principal

Adequate planning time is required to allow for the needs of all stakeholders to be discussed and addressed prior to implementation.

"We [school district and the logistical coordination team] met several times...so that we could work through pieces that might be confusion...and that worked for us."
– school administrator

Involvement of the school nurse is important to ensure seamless and consistent communication with families.

"...obviously the parents are going to call the Health Office is they have questions."
– school nurse

The mass vaccinator questioned the long-term financial sustainability of the model due to problems experienced in the third party billing process.

"You really have to have a complete understanding of whether or not you are going to be financially remunerated for your services in the model that you can sustain."

Conclusion:

School and mass vaccinator personnel found SLV-I to be logistically feasible and expressed interest in continuing the project. Active participation of school partners at all stages of planning and implementation is vital to project success. Successful implementation requires minimal disruption to regular school-day activities. Concerns regarding 3rd party billing needs to be addressed upfront to ensure financial sustainability.

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For more information about this study, contact: Sharon Humiston, MD, MPH, Principal Investigator at sghumiston@cmh.edu

Timeline of SLV-I Activities

Winter & Spring 2009

Spring 2009,
Spring 2010

Summer 2009,
Summer 2010

Fall 2009,
Fall 2010

Winter 2010,
Winter 2011

Project team meets with Director of Health Department

Outreach to school district superintendents to solicit interest

School districts identified; letter of agreements signed

Partner responsibilities outlined; plans developed to market program to families

Meetings with school staff and parents to discuss concerns and answer questions

School sends letters home to parents introducing vaccine clinics

Clinic dates set; partners address clinic logistics

Clinic information and consent forms sent to parents

Consent forms collected by school and forwarded to SLV-I team

SLV-I team reviewed consent forms for missing information and to confirm dosage

Clinics scheduled

SLV-I team available to answer questions about side effects of vaccine

Vaccinations reported to NYS Immunization Information System

Billed Insurance