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Alaska to Initiate HPV Vaccine Distribution Through Vaccines for Children Program Only

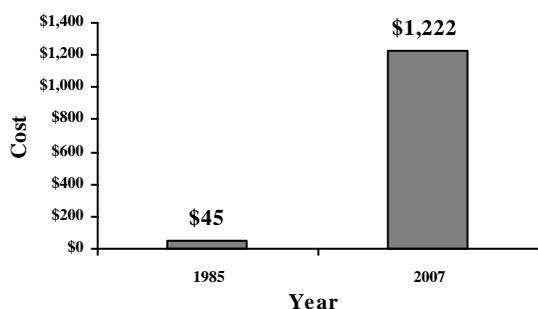
Background

For over 30 years the Alaska Immunization Program has maintained a “universal” vaccine program, distributing at no cost all recommended pediatric and selected adult vaccines to public and private providers in Alaska. This policy will undergo considerable changes with the implementation of the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine, Gardasil®.

Beginning June 1, 2007, the Alaska Immunization Program will begin distributing HPV vaccine for use only with persons who qualify for the federal Vaccines for Children (VFC) Program. Alaska providers will be required to screen patients to determine if they meet VFC eligibility criteria (see below) to receive state-supplied Gardasil®. Vaccines other than Gardasil® will continue to be supplied as they have in the past, i.e., no patient eligibility screening will be required.

Historically, the Alaska Immunization Program has used two sources of federal funding to support the costs of all recommended vaccines for all children: VFC, which pays for vaccines for children who qualify; and “Section 317,” which covers the cost of vaccines for the approximately one-third of Alaska children who are not VFC-eligible. However, Section 317 funding has not kept pace with the rapidly rising cost of vaccines. The cost of providing all recommended vaccines for children through age 18 years has increased more than twenty-fold since 1985 (Table).

Table. Alaska Immunization Program Cost to Purchase Recommended Vaccines for Each Child* through Age 18 Years, 1985 and 2007



*The cost shown for 2007 is for females. The cost for males is \$288 less because HPV vaccine currently is not recommended for males.

VFC Eligibility Criteria

Vaccines for Children (VFC) is a federal entitlement program that pays for vaccines for children aged 18 years or younger who meet at least one of the following eligibility criteria:

- Medicaid eligible;
- Alaska Native or American Indian;
- Uninsured;
- Underinsured, i.e., has insurance but it does not cover the cost of vaccines, and receiving services at a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC).

VFC Impact on Alaska Health Care Practices

Modifications resulting from VFC implementation are outlined below:

- *Provider Certification* – To receive vaccines from the Alaska Immunization Program, health care providers must certify/re-certify by June 1. New Provider Certification Packets will be mailed in early May. These materials also will be available at the Alaska Immunization Program website listed below under “Additional Information.” During certification, providers must agree to store and report on VFC vaccines (such as HPV) separately from other vaccines.
- *VFC Eligibility Screening and Documentation* – Vaccine recipients must be screened for VFC eligibility each time they receive a VFC vaccine. A record of the VFC screening must be maintained in the patient’s written or electronic medical record for at least three years. Patients are not required to supply proof of VFC eligibility. Providers must conduct screening during each visit, even for those patients (e.g., Alaska Natives) who clearly fall into a VFC eligibility category.
- *Vaccine Accountability* – VFC vaccines must be segregated from non-VFC vaccines during storage, and separate vaccine usage reporting must be submitted to the Alaska Immunization Program.

HPV Vaccine Availability in Alaska

HPV vaccine for use with VFC-eligible girls aged 9–18 years will be available to certified providers at the beginning of June. Details about HPV vaccine administration will be provided in a future *Epidemiology Bulletin*.

Other Funding Options for HPV Vaccine

The HPV vaccine is covered through many private insurance plans, though coverage will vary between policies. Medicaid covers the majority of the cost for eligible women aged 19–20 years. Women aged 19–26 years who meet income eligibility requirements may qualify for the Adult Vaccine Assistance Program established by Merck & Co., Inc., the manufacturer of HPV and other adult vaccines. More information on the Assistance Program is available at:

<http://www.merck.com/merckhelps/vaccines/home.html>.

Additional Information

- Alaska Immunization Program
<http://www.epi.hss.state.ak.us/id/immune.stm>
- Alaska Immunization Hotline 1-888-430-4321
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
VFC – <http://www.cdc.gov/nip/vfc/default.htm>
HPV – <http://www.cdc.gov/std/hpv/default.htm>