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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES

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Federal funding to boost Alaska's vaccine program

Health officials to make HPV and meningococcal vaccines available to more Alaska children

(Juneau, Alaska) — The Alaska Department of Health and Social Services announced today that an increase in federal funding will make it possible for all Alaska girls ages 9 through 18 to receive Gardasil[®], the vaccine to prevent cervical cancer, at no cost.

Earlier this spring, the department had said it could provide free Gardasil only to Alaska girls who met certain eligibility requirements. Since then, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provided additional funds for Alaska to obtain more vaccine. This boost in federal aid will enable more Alaska girls to receive Gardasil. Distribution of this vaccine to providers is just beginning, so state health officials suggest calling providers before visiting local clinics to find out if the vaccine is available.

“We are thrilled that this unanticipated funding will allow us to provide the vaccine for all eligible girls,” said Laurel Wood, Alaska’s immunization program manager. “Although we have no guarantee that this funding will be available in future years, we hope to immunize as many Alaska girls as possible while we have this unique opportunity.”

The federal government approved Gardasil last summer to prevent certain types of human papillomavirus (HPV) known to cause cervical cancer. Gardasil is the most expensive vaccine recommended today, with a retail cost of at least \$360 for three shots given over six months.

The CDC recommends the vaccine for girls and women 9 through 26 years old, but the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services only has funding to cover the vaccine for those ages 9 through 18. Women ages 19 through 26 may be able to receive some coverage through Medicaid, their health insurance companies or a special financial aid program set up by Merck & Co. Inc., the vaccine’s manufacturer.

The additional federal money for Alaska also means the department can expand availability of Menactra[®], the vaccine that protects against bacterial meningitis. Although the department previously provided Menactra only for limited age groups, it now will make the vaccine available at no cost for boys and girls ages 11 through 18.

For more information, visit <http://www.epi.alaska.gov/id/iz/hpv/>.