TNA ATTENDS QUARTERLY TISWG MEETINGS

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Since the last edition of the *Texas Nursing Voice,* the Texas Immunization Stakeholder Working Group (TISWG) has met twice – June 18th, 2009 and August 20th, 2009. TISWG was established by the 78th Texas legislature to focus on improving the state immunization rates with a special focus on children. TISWG brings together, under the Department of State Health Services (DSHS), a partnership of various agencies whose purpose is to develop a road map to assist the Immunization Division of DHSH set priorities and implement plans to increase the vaccination rates in the state. Members of the work group represent federal, state, and local agencies and programs; schools; health care providers; employers; insurance/health plans; vaccine manufactures; and those from the private sector.

During the June meeting, attendees focused on legislation that was passed by the 81st Texas legislature that would impact the Immunization Branch; stimulus funding projects, and initial discussions related to the H1N1 flu.

The Immunization Division of DSHS tracked 27 bills through the legislature this past session of which, at the time of the meeting, nine (9) had been passed while others were still pending the Governor's signature. Some of the legislation relates to the vaccination of students of institutions of higher learning against meningitis; to the adoption of an interstate compact on educational opportunity for military children; to hepatitis B vaccinations for students enrolled in certain health-related courses at an institution of higher learning; and to use of the immunization registry by adults, first-responders, in connection with a disaster. The attending stakeholders spent some time brainstorming in workgroups on implementation plans and ideas that were shared with the Immunization Division staff.

The Immunization Division will be receiving stimulus funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to implement some vaccine-related projects across the state. 75% of the stimulus finding is to go to vaccines and vaccine-enhancing projects/pilots. Plans for Texas include: partially funding the state's H1N1 response; improving regional clinical capabilities to administer flu vaccines to populations who do not live where there is an easily accessible health district clinic; expanding the vaccine distribution program especially in light of the pending H1N1 vaccine distribution; assessing the effectiveness of currently in

place school-based vaccine initiatives; developing a "cocooning" program across the state with a focus on pertussis; and promoting more extensive use of the state immunization registry – ImmTrac.

The remaining portion of the June meeting was dedicated to an update on the then current status of H1N1 flu and vaccinations.

The August meeting was dedicated to H1N1. The meeting focused on the many aspects associated with H1N1. Since little is known about the vaccine at this time, there are a lot of myths about it feeding into the public's overall distrust of vaccines. There is a sense of urgency related to the vaccine which gives the perception that the vaccine is being rushed to market. However, the TISWG stakeholders were assured that no corners were being cut in the vaccines development, testing, or production. Efficacy and safety of the vaccine are paramount. It is important that healthcare providers emphasize that there is a difference between the seasonal flu and the H1N1 flu and their respective vaccines.

The distribution process for the H1N1 vaccine once it becomes available in Texas is being fine tuned as more information come from the CDC. The desire is to keep it as simple as possible. All providers interested in providing the vaccine can go to www.texasflu.org for more information. It is believed that the vaccines will come with all the supplies – syringes, needles, swabs, and sharp's containers – that will be needed to administer the vaccine. The vaccines will be free-of-charge and can be recorded in ImmTrac starting September 1st as that will be the first day ImmTrac will be able to accept adult information.

As with any new medication or vaccine, adverse event reporting will be paramount. There currently is no information regarding adverse events related to the H1N1 vaccine. It will be imperative that health care providers report any suspected adverse events related to H1N1 to the database. The database is essentially a research tool that tracks trends in an effort to promote patient safety. Adverse events can be reported via phone, the internet, letter, or fax. When in doubt – report. DSHS will be modeling their reporting of adverse events related to the H1N1 vaccine after their seasonal flu model.

Media tours are planned to promote both professional and public education. A Pandemic Influenza Summit was held in Austin on August 10th. The purpose of the summit was to convene partners to discuss the H1N1 outbreak in Texas and to identify preparedness opportunities for Texas. The Summit focused on what worked well during the initial H1N1 outbreak in the spring and what lessons were learned to be better prepared this fall. The Summit also provided a forum to discuss important policy and procedural issues including the decision making process that will be followed, the new guidelines for lab and surveillance, the allocation and distribution of antivirals and the vaccine, community response related to school closures and screening, and concerns related to the health and medical surge capacity of the state. Regional conferences were held in August and September in an effort to take the Summit information to communities and officials throughout Texas. Public education will focus on providing accurate information to the citizens of Texas about H1N1through use of TV, radio, print, online, news, and social media.

These are interesting times for TISWG. The group has been helpful in providing feedback and suggestions to the Immunization Division of DSHS regarding H1N1 and in distributing information to their local partners back home. The Texas Nurses Association continues to be a proud member of TISWG as it works to improve the health of all the citizens of Texas. For more information regarding TISWG, please visit Texas Vaccine Partners at www.ImmunizeTexas.org.