



TFAH Commends Administration Announcement of Intention to Buy More Pandemic Antiviral Medication and Vaccines, However, Concerns About Timeliness Still Remain Unresolved

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Washington, DC, July 21, 2005 -- Trust for America's Health (TFAH) commends the Bush Administration's submission of a new budget amendment to Congress to allow the Secretary of Health and Human Services to purchase an additional allotment of the antiviral medications and vaccines necessary to prevent and contain a possible pandemic flu outbreak in the U.S.

HHS announced plans to purchase enough antiviral medication and H5N1 vaccine to treat 20 million Americans. This brings the U.S. closer to the percentage of antivirals ordered by other nations, yet falls short of the National Vaccine Advisory Committee's (NVAC) July 19, 2005, recommendation to purchase adequate antivirals to cover between 40 and 133 millions Americans. The Committee, along with the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, also made recommendations to first address the highest "priority populations," which includes health care workers with direct patient contact, public health and safety responders, and those most at risk for death from the disease once infected.

"Shoring up our stockpile of antivirals and vaccine is our best possible line of defense in case a pandemic flu outbreak hits the U.S.," said Shelley A. Hearne, DrPH, Executive Director of TFAH. "Congress should move swiftly to accept the Administration's budget request."

According to recent estimates released by TFAH, almost 70 million Americans would be at-risk for contracting the disease, if a moderately severe outbreak occurred in the U.S. Antiviral medication is considered by many scientists as the most effective way to save lives during the early stages of a pandemic. There is only one manufacturer worldwide of Tamiflu, the antiviral that is viewed as most effective against the current avian flu strain. A number of other nations have already placed large orders for Tamiflu, and delays in the ordering process puts the U.S. at risk for not having an adequate stockpile in place if a pandemic hits more quickly than the medication can be delivered.

TFAH points out that having sufficient antiviral medications and vaccines stockpiled is particularly important given the U.S. has limited domestic production capacity for a pandemic flu vaccine. Public health officials stated at the NVAC meeting on July 19th

that, based on current production capabilities, the U.S. could only produce five million doses of a pandemic flu vaccine per week once a pandemic strain is identified.

Trust for America's Health is a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to saving lives by protecting the health of every community and working to make disease prevention a national priority. www.healthyamericans.org