

Rod R. Blagojevich, Governor  
Damon T. Arnold, M.D., M.P.H., Director

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January 1, 2008

Dear Colleague:

On January 1, 2006, Public Act 94-0614, Mercury-Free Vaccine Act, became effective requiring vaccines to be mercury-free except for trace amounts. On January 1, 2008, the Act further states that "no person shall be vaccinated with a vaccine or injected with any product that contains, or prior to dilution, had contained as an additive, any mercury based product, whether at preservative or trace amount levels." On July 1, 2007, the Illinois Department of Public Health filed a statewide Declaration of Exemption on behalf of public and private health care providers for the following vaccines affected by the Act: Japanese Encephalitis, DT, Td, TT, Meningococcal Polysaccharide vaccine and the 2007-2008 Multi-dose Formula of Influenza vaccine as routinely used for individuals over three years of age. In accordance with the Act, it is the policy of the Department to preferentially distribute thimerosal free influenza vaccine to children ages 3 years and under as served through its Vaccines for Children (VFC) Program. This exemption remains in effect until June 30, 2008.

However, several products routinely used by pediatricians, family physicians and internists, alike are also affected by the provisions of the Act, including products currently in use for many adults.

The Act provides a means for the Department to evaluate and assess the needs of Illinois citizens to have access to vaccines. The Illinois Department of Public Health has filed a statewide Declaration of Exemption on behalf of public and private health care providers for the following vaccines affected by the Act as of January 1, 2008: Pediarix (DTaP-Hep B-IPV) and Twinrix (Hep A- Hep B), Tripedia and Hepatitis B single antigen product known as Engerix B.

- **Pediarix (DTaP-Hep B-IPV)**

Pediarix has never contained more than a trace of thimerosal. As a combination vaccine that is widely used in health care provider offices, it reduces the number of health care visits, sticks to the arm, improves record keeping and reduces overall costs to the patient. It should also be noted that a preservative free formulation of Pediarix was released for distribution in January 2007. However, vaccines delivered prior to 1/07 may likely be in providers' offices. Expiration dates extend 18-24 months following manufacture. Thus, the Illinois Department of Public Health has determined that Pediarix should be included in the Declaration of Exemption from P.A. 94-0614.

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• **Twinrix (Hepatitis A-Hepatitis B)**

Twinrix is licensed for administration to individuals 18 years of age and older and is a valuable means to protect adults at high risk of both hepatitis A and hepatitis B infections simultaneously. As a combination vaccine that is widely used in health care provider offices, it reduces the number of health care visits, sticks to the arm, improves record keeping and reduces overall costs to the patient. Thus, the Department has determined that this vaccine shall be declared exempt from the mandates of the Mercury-Free Vaccine Act.

• **Tripedia (DTaP)**

Although considered thimerosal free by FDA definition, Tripedia contains trace amounts of thimerosal as a result of the production process. IDPH has limited its purchase of this product through the VFC program during the last 12 months and will discontinue purchasing this product in 2008 provided other DTaP products are in adequate supply on the federal contract. However, other private providers may have remaining inventories of this product in offices. Therefore, the Department has determined that this vaccine shall be declared exempt from the mandates of the Act.


• **Engerix B (Hepatitis B)**

As of 1/30/07, a formula free of thimerosal product was released for distribution. However, this single antigen Hepatitis B product with trace amounts of thimerosal may remain in providers' inventories throughout the state. Thus, the Department has determined that this product shall be declared exempt from the mandates of the Act.

The Illinois Department of Public Health supports efforts to ensure vaccine safety. It has been committed to using preservative-free vaccines for its Vaccines for Children programs, beginning in 1999. However, for the reasons cited above for specific vaccines, it is imperative that the people of Illinois continue to have access to life-saving vaccines when necessary, without potential compromise to health and safety.

If you have questions about this Declaration of Exemption and Illinois immunization requirements, please contact Karen McMahon, Immunization Program Administrator, 217-785-1455 or TTY (for hearing impaired use only) 800-547-0466.

Sincerely,



Damon T. Arnold, M.D., M.P.H.  
Director

Attachment