



State of New Jersey
Department of Human Services
Division of Medical Assistance & Health Services

MEDICAID ALERT

MA-99-8

October 1999

TO: Birth Centers
Certified Nurse Midwives
Certified Nurse Practitioners/Clinical Nurse Specialists
Hospital-Chief Executive Officers
Federally Qualified Health Centers
Physicians
Health Maintenance Organizations-For Information

SUBJECT: Changed recommendations for newborn immunizations against hepatitis B

EFFECTIVE: Immediately

PURPOSE: The purpose of this Alert is to call the providers' attention to the recently issued Joint Statement of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the Public Health Service concerning thiomerosal, a mercury-containing additive in some childhood vaccines.

BACKGROUND: The joint statement of the Academy and the Public Health Services recommends maintaining the currently approved schedule for all immunizations except hepatitis B. The new recommendations for hepatitis B immunization are as follows:

- All infants born to hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg)-positive mothers and to mothers whose hepatitis B status is unknown, should receive the first dose of hepatitis B vaccine at birth.
- The immunization of term infants born to HBsAg-negative mothers should be postponed from birth until 2 to 6 months of age.
- The immunization of preterm infants born to HBsAg-negative mothers should be postponed from birth until the infant reaches term gestational age, or a weight of at least 5.5 lbs. (2.5 kg).
- In every case, the hepatitis B immunization series should be completed by 18 months of age.

Note: At the present time, only one hepatitis B vaccine, COMVAX, is thiomerosal-free. However, because COMVAX is a combined hepatitis B and Hib vaccine, it is not recommended for infants younger than six weeks of age. Other thiomerosal-free vaccines should be available in the near future.

ACTION: Parents should be advised of the benefits and risks of vaccines containing thiomerosal. Both the AAP and the Public Health Service strongly believe that the benefits far outweigh the small potential risk of thiomerosal exposure; and encourage continued immunization.

If you have any questions concerning this Medicaid Alert, please do not hesitate to contact Danuta Buzdygan, M.D., Chief Pediatric Consultant, at 609-588-2718.

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