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Pediatricians Identify Top 3 Issues for Children

Recently, more than 10,000 pediatricians attended the 2006 National Conference of the American Academy of Pediatrics. The three top health issues facing children and the doctors who treat them were identified as:

Influenza vaccine shortages

Although more pediatric vaccine is expected to be available this year than in years past, production problems at the sole manufacturer, the majority of those doses from being available until November or December, frustrating both doctors and parents.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control recommends vaccinating all children between 6 months and 59 months of age, as well as all the people in their household. Children younger than age 9 who receive their first flu shot need two vaccines, given approximately one month apart, to assure effectiveness.

While adult vaccines are not suitable for younger children, pediatricians unsure of delivery for their anticipated supply are exploring alternative options for their patients over age 5. Flumist is a vaccine administered as a nasal spray, rather than by injection and adequate supplies are available. Flumist is very effective and can be used in healthy children over five, who do not have asthma or heart disease.

However, vaccine programs and insurance companies have historically refused to pay for this product, so parents should check with their insurance company first or be prepared for an "out of pocket" expense if Flumist is their choice. Vaccine should be available for high-risk patients, so parents should call their pediatrician now to discuss options.

Bariatric surgery for morbidly obese teenagers

The number of obese teens continues to increase at an alarming rate, leaving these youngsters at risk for joint destruction, diabetes, hypertension, sleep disorders, and cardiac disease that can lead to early death. Teens who have a Body Mass Index (measurement of height versus weight) of 40 or greater and who have any of the above symptoms may be eligible for bariatric (gastric bypass and adjustable gastric band) surgery. While a healthy diet and exercise are essential, surgery can have even more

impressive results than those typically seen in adults, and teens seem to recover and respond more quickly.

ADHD medications are safe and effective

The continuing controversy and discussion regarding the safety and benefit of the three types of medication used to treat attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, leads to anxiety and stress for many parents. The three types of medications that have been approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) -- methylphenidate (Ritalin/Concerta), amphetamines (Dexedrine/Adderal) and atomoxetine (Strattera) -- were reviewed for effectiveness and safety.

All three classes of medication provide moderate to significant improvement in core ADHD symptoms: hyperactivity, inattention, and impulsivity. Although one FDA advisory panel recently raised concerns about the possibility of sudden unexplained death in children for whom amphetamines and methylphenidate were prescribed, most experts feel that there is not enough information to make an association between these medications and cardiac deaths. Although these medications were at one time thought to cause tics, it is now believed that they only exacerbate tics that already exist. Insomnia, decreased appetite, and weight loss, however, are well-known side effects that require close monitoring.

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