

August 27, 2008

## **Potential FluMist Project for Transylvania County Schools**

### Background (Why)

The population of children in any given community has long been regarded as the primary transmission vector for various communicable diseases. Interactions with family units and large numbers of other children in school settings promote ideal scenarios for disease transmission. Those circumstances are often compounded by the challenges associated with children consistently practicing personal hygiene measures like hand washing and covering their nose and mouth for coughing or sneezing.

Influenza is the primary example of this “child based” disease transmission concept. Public health has developed many models that support mass vaccinations of children to provide a degree of “herd immunity” for the rest of the community. The basic intent is to disrupt or negate the disease transmission cycle fostered by children. This doesn’t eliminate the disease from the community, but short circuits transmission cycles and substantially limits the incidence of influenza for all local residents.

Last year, we witnessed a classic case of influenza promulgation related to the school environment when another school system in our region had to temporarily close due to extraordinary absence rates among children and teachers. Transylvania County Schools experienced relatively high absentee rates during this same period last year, but was able to avoid any closures.

### Proposal (Who, What & Where)

The Transylvania County Board of Health held several discussions last year about a variety of factors associated with the flu season. The board advocated for the department to pursue opportunities and strategies which might promote higher vaccination rates among local children.

During the spring of 2009, the department became aware of state level discussions within the NC Division of Public Health Immunization Branch about promoting 2 or 3 pilot projects within the state to make FluMist available for school aged children. Dr. Wells had previously referenced a similar successful multi-year project in Knox County Schools, Tennessee. The department made a request to the Immunization Branch to be included in the initial year roll out and was subsequently approved for inclusion in July dependent upon Transylvania County Schools willingness to participate.

The Immunization Branch is prepared to provide FluMist at no cost to Transylvania County for this pilot project. The department is prepared to structure delivery and administration of FluMist with our shared school nurse resources at each school site. The preferred timeframe would be late September.

FluMist provides several distinct advantages. It is a nasal spray so children don't typically have the same aversion as they might to needle administration. Early data indicates that FluMist is more effective at preventing the onset of influenza and its protective period is substantially longer than other vaccine. It's also believed to provide a higher level of protection *even when the strain match is less than ideal*.

#### Next steps

Agreement with Transylvania County Schools Administration to support project

Presentation to Transylvania County Board of Education

Development of joint press release

Development of information packet for all parents (website, other alternatives)

Additional education campaign elements could include presentations to school staff, PTO's and other forums as desired by Transylvania County Schools

Determine schedule of "clinics" with schools once consent forms are returned and processed

Administer FluMist at school sites

Track absentee rates and compare to prior years

Evaluate project and refine process for future years if project continues