



Press Release

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NIMHD Awards Supplement to Promote Vaccination Against Influenza During Pregnancy in Puerto Rico

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200

Expected number of pregnant women to be impacted by the demonstration project.

San Juan, Puerto Rico The Center for Collaborative Research on Health Disparities (CCRHD) at the UPR Medical Sciences Campus, received a supplement award of \$130,000 from the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD) at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Funds were awarded to a demonstration project which will promote influenza vaccination among pregnant women in Puerto Rico during the 2013-2014 influenza season. The project is led by Dr. José. F. Cordero, Dean of the Graduate School of Public Health and Dr. Liza Anzalota, of the same school.

According to the Centers for the Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), pregnant women are at increased risk for serious health complications and death from influenza. The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), from the CDC, and the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) recommend that women who are pregnant during the flu season should be vaccinated against this serious disease. Despite the recommendations of the ACIP, immunization coverage in this group remains low and mortality remains high.

Preliminary data collected by the Puerto Rico Testsite for Exploring Contamination Threats (PRoTECT) team, a collaborator in the project, suggest that the influenza immunization coverage among pregnant women in the northern karst region of Puerto Rico is low. The project "Community demonstration to increase influenza immunization coverage among pregnant women in Puerto Rico" will integrate a combination of evidence-based approaches to increase vaccination coverage among pregnant women receiving prenatal care at Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) in Northern Puerto Rico. Strategies include provider assessment and feedback; reminder and recall systems, and a mass media campaign to promote influenza vaccination. The media campaign will be held in collaboration with a coalition of several volunteer organizations that promote immunization in Puerto Rico.

"By increasing influenza vaccination in pregnant women, we are protecting not only the mother but also the baby", said Dr. Cordero. Vaccination of pregnant women has been very low in the past seasons of flu in Puerto Rico. "This project will develop strategies in four primary care facilities at Camuy, Ciales, Morovis and Lares", added Dr. Anzalota.

"An important component of this project is assessing the impact of the proposed interventions on increasing vaccination during pregnancy", said Dr. Fernández-Repollet. She also stated that vaccination coverage among pregnant women during the 2013-2014 vaccination campaign will be compared to that of the previous season. "This demonstration project will allow us to expand the experience on how to increase the influenza vaccination among pregnant women in Puerto Rico which can be of help to other Hispanic communities in the United States" concluded Dr. Cordero.

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About of the Center for Collaborative Research in Health Disparities (CCRHD): The CCRHD focuses on the development of a more efficient and competitive research infrastructure to carry out basic, clinical and translational studies in health disparities affecting the Puerto Rican population. It includes five research facilities and six activities which provide administrative and research development support to investigators at the University of Puerto Rico Medical Sciences Campus. For more information about CCRHD and its facilities and projects, please visit <http://rcmi.rcm.upr.edu>.

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