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Vote & Vax Clinics Offer Flu Shots on Election Day

On Election Day, November 4, 2008, vaccination providers will host convenient flu shot clinics at or near many polling sites across the country. This non-partisan, non-political national public health strategy, called Vote & Vax, is intended to increase the number of Americans who receive a vaccination against the influenza virus. The approach is especially important for Americans age 50 and older who are at the greatest risk of having serious complications from the flu.

A partnership between the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) and Sickness Prevention Achieved through Regional Collaboration (SPARC), the Vote & Vax project recruits and helps influenza vaccination providers operate Vote & Vax clinics.

"Vote & Vax demonstrates that by thinking in new ways about our approach to the delivery of flu shots – especially the use of non-traditional settings – we can have a tremendous positive effect on a community's health," said Jane Isaacs Lowe, PhD, senior program officer at RWJF.

"The nationwide reach of Vote & Vax is a great opportunity to implement a creative and sensible public health strategy that reaches those most vulnerable to influenza," said Douglas Shenson, MD, MPH, of SPARC, who is directing the national effort. "You don't have to vote to get vaccinated at these clinics, but for a lot of Americans the convenience of both casting a ballot and protecting yourself from the flu is an attractive option."

More than 125 million Americans are expected to vote this November – and two-thirds of them are likely to be age 50 and older. Nearly 100 clinics have already signed on to the national effort, with new clinics joining daily.

Launched in 1996, the Vote & Vax project was established as a project to increase access to the flu vaccine, with a focus on reaching older Americans. In 2006, SPARC directed a multi-state effort to assess the usefulness and practicality of replicating this approach on a larger scale. That year, the pilot program took place at 127 polling sites in 14 states. Nearly 30 percent of individuals vaccinated in the pilot program had not received a flu shot in the preceding year. Election Day 2008 marks the first year that Vote & Vax clinics will be operating widely across the country.

Other organizations collaborating with Vote & Vax for 2008 include AARP, American Public Health Association, Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, Association of Immunization Managers, Immunization Coalitions Technical Assistance Network, National Association of County and City Health Officials and Visiting Nurse Associations of America.

Influenza is responsible for approximately 36,000 deaths annually in the U.S., and is a leading cause of death among older adults. Flu shots have been shown to save lives, decrease the rate of hospitalizations and save money. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that everyone age 50 and older be vaccinated for influenza. As polling sites traditionally attract a large percentage of adults age 50 and older, Election Day is an ideal time to offer and promote flu shots.

For more information about Vote & Vax, including information on clinic locations, please visit www.voteandvax.org.

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The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation focuses on the pressing health and health care issues facing our country. As the nation's largest philanthropy devoted exclusively to improving the health and health care of all Americans, the Foundation works with a diverse group of organizations and individuals to identify solutions and achieve comprehensive, meaningful and timely change. For more than 35 years the Foundation has brought experience, commitment, and a rigorous, balanced approach to the problems that affect the health and health care of those it serves. When it comes to helping Americans lead healthier lives and get the care they need, the Foundation expects to make a difference in your lifetime. For more information, visit www.rwjf.org.

SPARC (Sickness Prevention Achieved through Regional Collaboration)

SPARC (Sickness Prevention Achieved through Regional Collaboration) is an award-winning nonprofit health organization dedicated to developing innovative approaches to the delivery of critical disease prevention services. The organization is based in New England and has received funding from major national and regional philanthropic organizations, as well as state and federal healthcare agencies. With community partners, SPARC launched its first Vote & Vax clinics in 1997 and the agency has been instrumental in the subsequent national expansion of this initiative. SPARC has been recognized in testimony before the United States Senate and as a model program cited by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). For more information, visit www.sparc-health.org.