

Goldman Sachs, Citigroup got swine flu vaccine

November 5 2009, By KAREN MATTHEWS , Associated Press Writer



This April 16, 2009 file photo, shows a sign at the Citigroup Center in New York. Some of New York City's largest employers - including Citigroup - have started receiving doses of the much-in-demand swine flu vaccine for their at-risk employees. The swine flu vaccine has been in short supply nationwide because of manufacturing delays, resulting in long lines at clinics and patients being turned away at doctor's offices. The government has recommended that the limited supply go first to high-risk groups: children and young people through age 24, people caring for infants under 6 months, pregnant women and health care workers. Citigroup has received 1,200 doses, health officials said. (AP Photo/Mark Lennihan, file)

(AP) -- Some of New York's biggest companies, including Wall Street giants Goldman Sachs and Citigroup, received doses of swine flu vaccine for at-risk employees, drawing criticism that the hard-to-find vaccine is going first to the privileged.

Hospitals, universities and the Federal Reserve Bank also got doses of the vaccine for employees who need it the most, such as pregnant women or chronically ill workers, according to the city's health department.

In order to receive the vaccine, companies had to have their own medical staff. Distributing large doses of the vaccine to such businesses is "a great avenue for vaccinating people at risk," said Jessica Scaperotti, spokeswoman for the city Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

But critics said Wall Street firms should not have access to the vaccine before less wealthy Americans.

"Vaccines should go to people who need them most, not people who happen to work on Wall Street," Democratic Sen. Chris Dodd of Connecticut said Thursday.

"Wall Street banks have already taken so much from us. They've taken trillions of our tax dollars. They've taken away people's homes who are struggling to pay the bills," union official John VanDeventer wrote on the Web site of the 2 million-member Service Employees International Union. "But they should not be allowed to take away our health and well-being."

Meanwhile, the director of the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention sent a letter Thursday to state and local health departments asking them to review their distribution plans and make sure the vaccine is getting to high-risk groups.

Dr. Thomas Frieden said any decisions that appear to send vaccine beyond high-priority groups "have the potential to undermine the credibility of the program."

Swine flu vaccine has been in short supply nationwide because of manufacturing delays, resulting in long lines at clinics and patients being turned away at doctor's offices. The vaccine started trickling out in early October, and there are now nearly 36 million doses available.

The government-funded vaccine is being distributed to states, where health departments decide where to send the limited doses.

In New York, doctors at companies that have employee health services can request the vaccine along with other doctors but must agree to vaccinate only high-risk employees, Scaperotti said.

Last month, the city began offering vaccine to schoolchildren, as well as to pediatricians and obstetricians who asked for it. Scaperotti said two-thirds of the pediatricians in New York City have requested vaccine.

New Yorkers who cannot get the vaccine at work are receiving it from their doctors - if their doctors have it - or at community health clinics.

About 50 people waited to be vaccinated Thursday at a city-run clinic in Manhattan's Chelsea neighborhood. Matt Bohart said he and his 82-year-old father, Eugene Bohart, had been waiting for three hours for both swine flu and seasonal flu vaccines.

The younger Bohart said the fact that employees of some companies can get the vaccine at work seemed "not really fair."

But he added, "I don't begrudge the people who get it as long as others can get it as well."

Dr. William Schaffner, a flu expert at Vanderbilt University, said allocation of limited vaccine is tricky. CDC guidelines provide a list of patients who should be at the front of the line: children and young people

through age 24, people caring for infants under 6 months, pregnant women, health care workers, and adults with health conditions such as asthma and diabetes.

Schaffner said that if corporations are giving shots to at-risk people, the distribution may have been appropriate. But he acknowledged there's "an appearance of potential irregularity."

Still, he said, "I have a feeling that if it were a Ford dealership that got vaccine, there wouldn't be quite as much excitement."

Scaperotti said 50 employers in New York City have received the vaccine so far. Besides Goldman Sachs and Citigroup, they include Time Inc. and hospitals such as Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center.

Goldman Sachs has received 200 doses, and Citigroup has received 1,200, health officials said.

In statements, Citigroup and Goldman Sachs said the vaccine would only go to those in high-risk groups.

"Goldman Sachs, like other responsible employers, has requested vaccine and will supply it only to employees who qualify," spokesman Ed Canaday said.

Morgan Stanley received 1,000 doses of the vaccine for its New York and suburban offices, but the company turned over its entire supply to local hospitals when it learned it received shipments before some area hospitals, spokeswoman Jeanmarie McFadden said.

©2009 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

Citation: Goldman Sachs, Citigroup got swine flu vaccine (2009, November 5) retrieved 8 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2009-11-goldman-sachs-citigroup-swine-flu.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.