

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Supplementary Budget Estimates 2010-11, 20 October 2010

Question: E10-386

OUTCOME 1: Population Health

Topic: AUSTRALIAN INFLUENZA VACCINE COMMITTEE

Written Question on Notice

Senator Fierravanti-Wells asked:

Outline the decisions made by Australian Influenza Vaccine Committee (AIVC) in relation to the H1N1 pandemic and the seasonal flu season including:

- a) Meeting dates
- b) Outcome of meetings
- c) Dates of any advice to Government
- d) Dates of any advice to other government bodies, including the name of that other organisation
- e) Were any conflicts of interests declared by any members in relation to any of such meetings?
- f) How does AIVC deal with conflicts of interest?

Answer:

The Influenza Vaccine Committee was established in 1969 to examine and report on the constitution of influenza vaccine as considered from time to time and any other matter referred to the Committee. At that time, the committee consisted of five members who were experts in influenza virology and vaccine production.

The committee is now called the Australian Influenza Vaccine Committee (AIVC) and consists of 16 members with a broad range of expertise related to vaccinology, virology, manufacturing and regulation. The AIVC is a technical expert working group, which recommends suitable strains to be included in the Australian influenza vaccine, and all members are required to declare any conflict of interest before each meeting.

The committee usually meets annually in October, following the World Health Organisation (WHO) Southern Hemisphere (SH) strain consultation meeting, which recommends suitable strains to be included in the SH influenza vaccine. The AIVC endorses or modifies the WHO recommendation based on regional information about influenza viruses that are geographically relevant to Australia and the suitability of particular influenza strains to be included in the influenza vaccines for Australia.

More detailed answers to the specific points mentioned in the question are provided below:

a) Meeting dates

Generally, the AIVC meets once each year in the first week of October. For example, the 2010 meeting was held on October 6.

b) Outcome of meetings

*Seasonal Vaccine*

The World Health Organisation (WHO) convenes a technical meeting in September each year to recommend the composition of influenza vaccines for the southern hemisphere.

The AIVC is a technical working group that either endorses or modifies the WHO recommendation.

For example, the WHO recommended that vaccines for use in the 2010 influenza season (southern hemisphere winter) contain the following:

- an A/California/7/2009 (H1N1)-like virus;
- an A/Perth/16/2009 (H3N2)-like virus;
- a B/Brisbane/60/2008-like virus.

The AIVC agreed to endorse the WHO recommendations for the Australian 2010 influenza season.

*H1N1 Pandemic vaccine*

On 26 May 2009, the WHO recommended that vaccines contain an A/California/7/2009 (H1N1)-like virus.

On 27 May 2009, the AIVC agreed to endorse the WHO recommendation.

c) Dates of any advice to Government

*Seasonal Vaccine*

The sole function of the AIVC is to either endorse or modify the WHO recommendation regarding the virus strain composition of influenza vaccines. This recommendation is provided at the AIVC's annual meeting, usually in the first week of October each year. For example, recent meetings and advice to the TGA were provided on 2 October 2009 and 6 October 2010.

*H1N1 Pandemic vaccine*

The AIVC provided advice to the TGA about the virus strain for the pandemic vaccine on 27 May 2009.

d) Dates of advice to other government bodies

The AIVC provides advice to the TGA on the suitability of the WHO recommendation for virus strains to be used in influenza vaccines for Australia. This advice is shared with the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing.

e) Declarations of conflict of interest

Yes. All members complete conflict of interest forms. Some members make declarations that include share holdings and in-kind or financial support for scientific projects from pharmaceutical companies. These declarations are considered by the Chair of the Committee to determine their potential to influence member(s).

However, the AIVC has no role in selection of products or procurement of vaccines. Its role is solely to recommend which strains of influenza virus should be included in the Australian influenza vaccine.

f) Dealing with conflicts of interest.

The choice of viruses for each year's influenza vaccines is a global issue overseen by the WHO and tailored for each region and country. The AIVC provides the technical input required to endorse or modify the WHO recommendation regarding virus strains for all influenza vaccines supplied into Australia. The AIVC does not provide any advice or have any input into the registration process or the procurement, supply, distribution, stockpiling, use or monitoring of influenza vaccines in Australia.

The Chairman of the AIVC is a Commonwealth public servant and considers any declared conflicts of interest, prior to the start of the meeting, in the context of the role of the AIVC. Where a declared conflict of interest is considered relevant to the deliberations of the committee, the Chair of the committee ensures that the relevant member does not participate in any decision making related to that conflict.