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CDC Alert on Ricin

The United States Postal Service, in conjunction with federal and state law enforcement and public health officials, identified an unmarked and sealed envelope containing a threatening note and a sealed container believed to contain a toxic substance at a small postal handling facility in Greenville, South Carolina. The Department of Health and Human Services' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) confirmed that the substance was the toxin Ricin.

The facility was closed and CDC conducted environmental testing. The results of the environmental testing were negative for the presence of Ricin. There are no indications of employee exposure or of adverse health effects as a result of this incident. A criminal investigation by the FBI and US Postal Inspection Service is currently underway.

Ricin is a potent biologic toxin that is derived from castor beans. Inhalation of Ricin or of abrin, which is a closely related toxin, typically leads to cough and respiratory distress followed by pulmonary edema, respiratory failure, and multisystem organ failure. Weakness and influenza-like symptoms of fever, myalgia, and arthralgia may also be reported.

For an overview of Ricin, including signs, symptoms, and treatment, please visit <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/ricin/index.asp>.

Anyone needing more information on Ricin poisoning should contact a local poison control center.

Clinicians who suspect cases of Ricin poisoning are requested to immediately report such cases to their state or local health departments.

CDC requests that reports of suspected cases from state and local health departments be reported to the CDC Emergency Operations Center, telephone 770-488-7100.

FDA and CDC Statement Concerning Rumors About Recalled Lot of Influenza Vaccine

Rumors have been circulating that a "contaminated" lot of flu vaccine has been recalled by the FDA. This is false. No contamination of any flu vaccine has been identified anywhere in the U.S., and the FDA has not recalled any lot of flu vaccine. Flu vaccine is routinely tested for safety, purity, and potency and all lots released have met these standards. As with any vaccine, flu vaccine is capable of causing some side effects, these are very rarely severe. Most side effects from flu vaccine are mild, such as arm soreness, redness or swelling where the shot was given, fever, or achiness. More serious reactions to the flu vaccine do occur, but they are rare. While FDA and CDC are currently investigating several recent reports of possible significant allergic reactions to flu vaccine, it is important to note that the number and type of reactions reported to date are not unexpected. The reactions reported, not all of which may have been caused by the administration of vaccine, do not, at this time, suggest any problem with the flu vaccine. However, FDA and CDC will continue to investigate these and any other reports and will provide any further information as available. While serious reactions to flu vaccine are rare, each year about 114,000 people in the U.S. are hospitalized and about 36,000 people die because of the flu. The flu vaccine is the best way a person can protect

themselves and their loved ones against influenza. October and November are the best months to get vaccinated - however, vaccination in December or later still provides considerable protection. For more information about influenza, go to <http://www.cdc.gov/nip/Flu>.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) protects people's health and safety by preventing and controlling diseases and injuries; enhances health decisions by providing credible information on critical health issues; and promotes healthy living through strong partnerships with local, national and international organizations.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES