



TRIPLER ARMY MEDICAL CENTER

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Tripler program provides flu shots to Pacific islanders

Tripler Army Medical Center reached out again this year, over 5,000 miles of the Pacific Ocean, to Guam and other small Pacific islands, to donate 17,500 surplus doses of seasonal influenza vaccine that would otherwise have been discarded.

This week, Tripler partnered with Hawaiian Airlines and Continental Micronesia Airlines to fly the surplus vaccine to American Samoa, Guam, Federated States of Micronesia, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and the Marshall Islands.

“The countries receiving them are more than happy to get the vaccine, free of charge,” Cpt. Daniel O’Neil, Tripler logistics medical officer, said. “The program fosters good relations with these countries and gives us an outlet to use these vaccines instead of just discarding them. It benefits not only us but the countries receiving them.”

While the flu season is over in the United States, influenza is a year-round contagious disease in the tropics. The Pacific Island Health Officers Association, comprised of the chief health officers of the various islands, determined how the vaccines would be distributed in their respective islands.

The U.S. Army Medical Materiel Agency and the Military Vaccine Agency helped coordinate and ship the surplus vaccines from military treatment facilities nationwide to Tripler, where the project was managed by Tripler’s logistics division and preventive medicine department.

Unlike the past two years, all the vaccine donated this year, is injectable, with about 40% in dosages for pediatric patients. According to Col. Mike Sigmon, Tripler’s preventive medicine chief, seasonal influenza kills an average of 36,000 Americans annually. Receiving the flu shot protects not only recipients but those who work or live closely with them, especially the very young and very old.

The program began in 2007, when Joint Task Force-Homeland Defense at Fort Shafter recognized the need in these islands for influenza vaccine and the availability of DoD’s excess influenza vaccine. In a trial run, 7,800 doses of DoD excess influenza vaccine on Oahu were collected and shipped to the Northern Mariana Islands.

Last year, the program expanded, and 26,500 doses were distributed to the health departments of U.S. territories (Guam and American Samoa) and former trust territory governments in the Pacific basin.

“Based on the success of the last two years, Tripler Army Medical Center and JTF-HD, collaborating with the governmental and non-governmental agencies, and through the generosity of airline partners, Continental Micronesia and Hawaiian Airlines, will continue to deliver a tangible health benefit to the people of the U.S. Affiliated Pacific Islands,” Sigmon said. The airlines are shipping the vaccine at no cost to these islands.



PACKING IT ALL IN. Tripler Army Medical Center’s logistics division personnel prepare to ship excess DoD seasonal influenza vaccine to U.S. –affiliated Pacific islands. At left, warehouse receiving supervisor Mike Tallackson packs cooling gel into a shipping box. Meanwhile, medical supply technicians Pvt. 1st Class Louis Culver and Spec. Kelly Eberts are handed a temperature recorder by warehouse supervisor Lincoln Laysa. The recorder is checked when the carton is opened, to ensure the vaccine shipment remained at the required low temperature range during shipment. U.S. Army photo by Leslie Ozawa