

Dispatch: Congress Passes Healthcare Legislation, Americans Pass on Flu Shots

By ACSH Staff — March 22, 2010

House Passes Health Care Bill

The big news of the day is the passage of the Health Care and Education Affordability Reconciliation Act of 2010 by the House of Representatives. Some changes to the bill still need to be approved by a majority in the Senate.

“ACSH does not deal with issues related to health insurance policy or federal funding of healthcare,” says ACSH’s Dr. Elizabeth Whelan. “However, there are other aspects of this that we have weighed in on before. For example, the [Center for Science in the Public Interest is celebrating](#) ^[1] the fact that the law would require all chain restaurants to post calorie counts on their menus, which we’ve commented on several times. Right now we simply do not know everything that is in the bill.”

“That’s the most important point,” says ACSH’s Jeff Stier. “The House just passed a major piece of legislation, and many experts don’t even know all the provisions of it. We’ve mentioned before how [healthcare reform might inhibit the innovation of the pharmaceutical industry](#) ^[2], and we will continue to closely monitor this issue. As far as the process of this legislation, the fact that we didn’t know about the calorie count provision before raises very serious questions. There are provisions in this bill that were not duly deliberated.”

“We will be keeping a close eye on this as we figure out what’s in the bill,” says ACSH’s Dr. Gilbert Ross. “We encourage readers to send in comments about aspects of the bill that concern them. There are many health-related topics that fall within ACSH’s purview, and we will speak up about them as they come to light. For example, I [have](#) ^[3] [condemned](#) ^[4] the lack of any consideration of reform of the medical malpractice system (‘tort reform’) in the many iterations of this bill, despite the fact that all the objective analyses I’ve seen assert that billions of dollars in savings each year over the next decade would result. And I still am unsure of whether drug re-importation is part of the bill or not.”

“Now more than ever we need to be keeping an eye on the regulatory agencies,” adds Stier. “It used to be that activists groups were there to monitor the agencies. These days, former leaders of those groups are *staffing* those agencies. ACSH will be monitoring them in the days and months ahead. More than ever before, regulatory agencies are going to be responsible for issues that you used to be responsible for yourself.”

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Not Exactly Great News

Massachusetts led the nation in vaccination rates against both the seasonal and H1N1 influenza viruses. [The Boston Globe reports](#) [6], "Thirty-six percent of residents were inoculated against the swine strain, also known as H1N1, compared with 21% nationally. Seasonal flu vaccinations were administered to 57% of the state's population, compared with 37% of the country."

"These national numbers are really horrible," says Dr. Ross. "There were many people dying needlessly because of these poor vaccination rates. The H1N1 was milder than expected, and the seasonal flu didn't really make an appearance, but we should remind everyone that over 12,000 Americans died from H1N1, many of which were children. That's about 12,000 more than died from plastic toxicants and lead poisoning last year."

"It's just a matter of luck that it wasn't much worse," says Dr. Whelan. "When it comes to the flu, it's always best to get the shot."

Curtis Porter is a research intern at the American Council on Science and Health (ACSH.org).

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[1] <http://www.cspinet.org/new/201003211.html>

[2] <http://washingtontimes.com/news/2009/nov/01/no-placebo-for-lower-costs/>

[3] <http://www.american.com/archive/2009/september/an-empty-nod-to-tort-reform>

[4] <http://spectator.org/archives/2009/06/26/free-riding-lawyers-on-the-oba>

[5] <https://www.acsh.org/.../.../support>

[6] http://www.boston.com/news/health/articles/2010/03/21/mass_tops_nation_in_flu_shots_report_says/