

## Rural Iowans offered flu vaccine at voting booths

Voting is often called one's "civic duty." It's for one's own good and that of the community. The same might be said of getting vaccinated, especially during influenza season.

On Nov 7, 2006 nearly 500 Iowans were able to do both at seven polling places in Louisa County.

"So many people commented on what a great idea this was," said Mary Louise Bayne of the Louisa County Volunteer Corps (LCVC). "Everything was so well-organized, and the process went so smoothly; no one had to wait long to get a vaccination."

The effort to provide influenza and pneumonia vaccinations at polling places was part of the national "Vote and Vax" program. Louisa County Public Health was selected from 60 county applicants as one of 25 organizations to receive funding for the project. The department received \$8,000 to hold the clinics in this rural southeastern Iowa county, where a number of barriers limit access to routine health care services.

### Overcoming challenges

Louisa County Public Health administrator Alana Poage says that holding the clinics was not without its challenges. "It was difficult to find sites where we could legally hold the clinics," Poage said. The department worked closely with the Louisa County Auditor's office to identify locations.

"Staffing the clinics required a little more creativity," Poage recalls. Members of the LCVC, the local version of a medical response corps, quickly offered their services, supplying about half of the manpower required to keep all seven clinics open for 12 hours. For the remaining sites, students were recruited from Iowa Wesleyan College, the University of Iowa School of Nursing, and the Southeastern Community College Nursing Program.

Poage said it was also necessary to consider the design of the polling place. "Ideally, we wanted residents to transition smoothly from voting to



*Madde Johnson sits on her mother Ann's lap and brother Drew watches as paramedic Damon Moore administers a flu vaccination at the Briggs Civic Center, the polling site for all wards in Wapello.*

vaccinations without leaving the building." Despite the less-than-perfect design of some sites, Poage says the effort was very successful. "Even when people had to cross the street or go to another floor of the building, the response was still excellent."

### Measuring success

Poage reported that 499 Louisa County residents received flu vaccinations during the 12 hours the seven clinics were open. "This is three times the number of vaccinations provided on any single day previously in Louisa County," she pointed out.

Sixty-four of the recipients said they probably would not have gotten vaccinated this year if it hadn't been for the Vote and Vax program. Another 25 people said they were uncertain whether they would have sought vaccination at another place or time.

