

District Health Department #10

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NEWS RELEASE

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Health Department Planning for H1N1 Flu Vaccinations this Fall

District Health Department #10 is actively planning for a voluntary novel H1N1 influenza vaccination campaign this fall. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has taken steps to provide H1N1 vaccine to local health departments to help protect people from this type of flu.

We share in the concern that this new flu virus may cause increased, and possibly more severe, illness during the upcoming fall and winter months, said Linda VanGills, Health Officer for District Health Department #10. We are making plans now to provide H1N1 vaccine to our residents as soon as it is available.

This past spring, novel influenza A (H1N1) virus emerged as a new type of flu virus. In June, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared that a global pandemic was underway, based on widespread occurrence at that time. The virus has continued to spread and persists today. CDC anticipates there will be increases in infections with H1N1 in the U.S. this fall and winter. Thus far, infections have been relatively mild, but flu viruses are constantly changing. The concern is that the new virus will mutate, causing severe illness in large numbers of people.

Symptoms of novel H1N1 influenza are similar to those for seasonal flu, and it may be difficult to differentiate between the two. Taken together, both have the potential to cause significant illness with associated hospitalizations and deaths during the U.S. influenza season.

Symptoms of both types of flu include fever, chills, cough, runny nose, headache, body aches, and fatigue. Prevention and treatment are also the same. Treatment may involve use of antiviral medications if prescribed by a health care provider.

You can help protect yourself from influenza infection with these personal practices:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you are sick with flu-like illness, CDC recommends that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone, except to get medical care or other necessities. (Your fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.) Stay away from others as much as possible to keep from making others sick.
- Follow public health advice regarding additional infection control measures.

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Vaccination remains the single best way to prevent infection with the flu. The new H1N1 vaccine does not replace seasonal flu vaccine, and seasonal flu vaccine does not protect against H1N1 flu. The two vaccines are not the same.

Because enough H1N1 vaccine may not initially be available for everyone, CDC is recommending that certain priority groups receive H1N1 vaccine before others. These are the same groups who have been the most severely affected by H1N1 infection to date, or who are most likely to spread it to others.

CDC priority groups include:

- Pregnant women;
- People who live with or care for infants younger than 6 months of age;
- Health care and emergency services personnel with direct patient contact;
- Children 6 months through 4 years of age; and
- Children ages 5 through 18 years who have chronic health conditions that increase their risk of complications from flu.

These group recommendations may seem confusing because they do not include all the people for which seasonal flu vaccine is the most highly recommended. Once there is enough H1N1 vaccine, other groups of persons will be offered the vaccine, with the goal of providing it to everyone.

CDC anticipates the first H1N1 vaccine may be available as soon as mid-October. Seasonal flu vaccine will be available earlier, and it is recommended you be vaccinated for seasonal flu as soon as it is offered in your local area.

There are many unknowns surrounding the novel H1N1 flu virus. Additional information may be found on the CDC website www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu. The Health Department is working with state and local health authorities to provide you with the best advice on how to protect against H1N1 infection.

As soon as we know more, we will provide you with an update regarding local planning for H1N1 vaccination. Seasonal flu vaccinations will still be offered as usual at the Health Department beginning in September. Please watch or call for clinic locations and times.

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