

ShowMe Health

Subject: Tired of H1N1?

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Author: Sherry Weldon, RN, Administrator

Do you feel like you've been bombarded with information about the H1N1 influenza virus these past few weeks? I would have to agree-some days that is all I deal with.

As the Emergency Planner and Administrator for the Livingston County Health Center, I am responsible for "being prepared" for whatever public health emergency comes our way. The Health Center has been involved in many aspects of disaster planning since 9/11. Pandemic influenza (H1N1) just happens to be at the top of our list at this time.

A pandemic is an epidemic of infectious disease that is spreading through human populations across a large region; for instance a continent, or even worldwide. Throughout history there have been a number of pandemics, such as smallpox and tuberculosis. More recent pandemics include the HIV pandemic and the current H1N1 flu pandemic.

I heard an official representing Public Health say "we're dammed if we do and we're dammed if we don't" meaning, if we go to all the trouble of preparing for a pandemic and there isn't much of one then the public will say we were just trying to scare people, but if we don't prepare for a pandemic and there is one, our name will be mud in the public's mind and lots of people will become ill that otherwise wouldn't have, had we prepared for it.

I would much rather the public *get sick of hearing about H1N1* than to have the public *get sick* from H1N1 because we didn't do our job... which is to prevent, promote, and protect - the public health motto.

We've all been alerted that a vaccine is being developed and is being tested at this time. Once the vaccine is delivered to the health center we will begin distributing it to all the providers that will vaccinate according to the priority list from the CDC. Pregnant women and the families and caretakers of infants under 6 months of age will be the first to receive the vaccine. Once we have offered it to that portion of the public we will then offer to the healthcare workers and emergency personnel workers. Infants, children, and adolescents 6 months of age through 24 years of age are our next target

population. Again after that group has had a chance to be vaccinated it will be then offered to people 25 through 64 years of age with chronic medical conditions.

Our first shipment- called a bolus-will most likely arrive mid-October with weekly shipments thereafter. It should not be long before we have enough vaccine to offer to all those mentioned above if they desire an H1N1 vaccination.

I want to strongly urge anyone that normally gets a flu shot each year to not ignore the seasonal flu shots. Individuals over 65 should get their flu shot as usual but will not be getting an H1N1 flu shot at this time. Studies have shown that healthy seniors have been exposed to this influenza over their lifetime and have a natural immunity that has built up over the years. H1N1 influenza has not shown to affect the older population but the young instead with pregnant women being the most affected.

The Livingston County Health Center recently met with community leaders to discuss and prepare for the upcoming flu season. We have already begun to fight the flu way before the vaccine arrives. The best fight is to become knowledgeable and then practice what you've learned. Cover your cough, stay home if you're sick and wash your hands often to mention a few.

To find out more ways to stay healthy this fall and winter visit www.cdc.gov/flu or come to the health center and we will provide you with information you need to stay well this flu season.