

KEY TALKINGPOINTS ON H1N1 INFLUENZA AND H1N1 VACCINE

August 28, 2009

Why should you get the vaccine?

Answer: We don't know enough about this virus to say that it's OK to get sick and then you'll recover in a few days. We don't know who is going to have a bad reaction to this virus and become seriously ill.

Therefore, we would rather reduce the number of people who get sick by encouraging people to be vaccinated. This is even more important for people in one of the high-risk groups –

- pregnant women;
- infants and young children;
- and kids 5 to 18 years of age with underlying medical problems.

Facts about the vaccine:

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention currently estimate that 45 million doses of H1N1 vaccine will be available nationwide by mid-October.

- Missouri's allotment is about 850,000 doses.
- It is expected that people will need two shots to make the vaccine effective. But clinical trials are under way now to learn whether one shot will be enough.

In Missouri, the vaccine will be distributed by local public health departments.

- Every county will receive an allotment.
- These local health departments are now lining up physicians, clinics, retailers and perhaps some schools.
- The local health departments, which know their communities best, will determine how much vaccine will to each distribution site.

The federal government is supplying the vaccine free of charge.

- Public health centers will not charge for the vaccine.
- Private offices and retailers might charge a fee for administering the shot.

In case of limited supplies of vaccine, these are the priority groups to receive vaccinations:

- pregnant women,
- people who live with or care for children younger than 6 months of age,
- health care and emergency medical services personnel with direct patient contact,
- children 6 months through 4 years of age, and
- children 5 through 18 years of age who have chronic medical conditions.

YOUR LOCAL LINK TO PUBLIC HEALTH

LIVINGSTON COUNTY HEALTH CENTER

Why seniors are not in the highest priority group for H1N1 vaccination:

- Senior adults are usually encouraged to get their seasonal flu vaccinations early because they are at high risk of complications from influenza viruses,
- However, seniors are not listed among the priority groups for H1N1 vaccine. Many older persons, who have been exposed to many different influenza viruses in their lifetime, appear to have some immunity against this new H1N1 flu strain.
- Initial vaccine supplies are expected in October, with more vaccine becoming available over the next few months. The groups most at risk will receive the first supplies.
- Therefore, seniors will be asked to wait until higher risk groups have had a chance to receive the vaccine.
- As soon as available vaccine supplies meet the needs of the highest-risk groups, vaccine programs and providers should begin offering H1N1 vaccination to people 65 years and older.
- Older persons should be encouraged to get the vaccine against the seasonal flu while they are waiting to be inoculated against the new H1N1 virus.

GENERAL POINTS ABOUT H1N1 INFLUENZA

Individual cases and even outbreaks of new H1N1 flu virus infections are not surprising anywhere in Missouri. This virus is now circulating worldwide and has been present in the United States since April.

On June 11, 2009, the World Health Organization determined that there was a worldwide epidemic of this virus. This means that there are now community-level outbreaks going on throughout the world.

The H1N1 virus, also known as swine flu, is highly contagious and is easily transmitted from person to person.

However, the vast majority of people who have contracted the illness have reported relatively mild symptoms. Most people recover in a few days without treatment. If symptoms are severe, two common antiviral medications are available by prescription.

The H1N1 virus has been crowding out the regular seasonal flu virus in the United States so that nearly all flu cases being reported in the United States are the new H1N1 strain. Therefore, it is becoming the standard flu in this country.

So far, illness caused by the H1N1 virus has primarily affected younger people and symptoms have usually been mild. However, the virus is more than a nuisance because it can be deadly. For certain people, especially those with weakened immune systems, any type of influenza is potentially life-threatening.

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