

H1N1 and Seasonal Flu Update – September 9, 2009
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Illness associated with the H1N1 virus has continued through the summer months. As of September 2, there have been 1,977 laboratory-confirmed cases among Connecticut residents. One hundred and thirty nine people in the state have been hospitalized for H1N1 related illnesses and nine have died. There have been 45 confirmed cases in Bristol and four in Burlington. Testing for the virus remains on a case by case basis with the focus on testing of hospital patients and areas where there is an identified outbreak.

More illness is anticipated this fall and winter. Several countries in the Southern Hemisphere are currently experiencing widespread H1N1 outbreaks. There have also been reports of outbreaks in the southern and western parts of the United States including Emory University in Atlanta, Tulane University in New Orleans and the University of Alabama. The northeast will most likely see increased flu activity this month (September) when most schools open for the fall. The Bristol-Burlington Health District continues to work with school and government officials as well as other agencies to educate the community in prevention and early intervention to limit the spread of illness.

Articles have also been published in the *Bristol Press* and the *Bristol Observer*. It is interesting to note that after H1N1 influenza was declared a public health emergency in April 2009, many local health departments were not able to provide online information to their constituents. (Source: *The Nation's Health*, September 2009). Fortunately, BBHD has a more nimble process for posting information. By the end of April, three fact sheets had been posted online. Currently there are ten documents related to H1N1 that contain local data and information in addition to links to state and national websites. The BBHD website is www.bbhd.org.

At this time, recommended responses to the H1N1 virus continue to focus on hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette, routine cleaning, separating ill persons and early treatment of anyone who is high-risk. It is anticipated that the H1N1 vaccine will be available sometime in October. Connecticut has decided to use public and private sectors to immunize the public. Pre-registration for vaccine providers has begun. However, the amount of vaccine and the delivery dates have not yet been finalized. The state and local agencies are working closely together to determine how best to distribute the initial supply.

Recommendations for prioritized groups include pregnant women, household contacts and caregivers for children younger than six months of age, healthcare and emergency medical services personnel, all children from six months through 24 years of age and persons aged 25 through 64 with certain health conditions. Once the demand for these groups has been met, vaccine distribution will include persons aged 25 through 64 years of age. Persons aged 65 and older may have some immunity to the H1N1 virus.

Concurrently, the seasonal flu season is underway. Unfortunately the H1N1 vaccine could not be incorporated into the seasonal flu vaccine - dual immunity is not possible. Therefore, it continues to be important to vaccinate for the seasonal flu. Persons age 50 years of age and older are strongly recommended to receive this vaccine since they are at increased risk for complications from this virus strain.

The Health District has scheduled three seasonal flu vaccine clinics for residents 18 years of age and older. They will be held on Tuesday, October 6 and Thursday, October 22 at the Douglas Beals Senior Center from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and on Wednesday, October 7 at the Burlington Senior Center from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. More information is available on the BBHD website. (Note: Each year in the United States, five to twenty per cent of the population become ill each year with seasonal flu symptoms. Between 130,000 and 200,000 people are hospitalized and approximately 36,000 people die for the flu and complications).