

H1N1 Update – October 13, 2009

DUE TO THE LIMITED SUPPLY OF H1N1 VACCINE, THE BRISTOL-BURLINGTON HEALTH DISTRICT HAS NOT YET SCHEDULED MASS VACCINATION CLINICS. ONCE THE VACCINE IS MORE WIDELY AVAILABLE, WE WILL BE COORINDATING CLINICS FOR THE PUBLIC. INFORMATION REGARDING THESE CLINICS WILL BE POSTED ON THIS WEBSITE. PLEASE CHECK BACK IN THE NEXT FEW WEEKS FOR ADDITIONAL DETAILS.

Influenza (“the flu”): The flu is an illness caused by a virus. It mainly attacks the nose, throat and lungs. Several common flu strains are around each year during the “flu season” which typically occurs in the fall and winter months. Most people who are infected with the seasonal flu virus recover without complications. Symptoms generally include fever, body aches, extreme tiredness, and a dry cough. However, the seasonal flu can be serious. Every year in the US, there are approximately 200,000 hospitalizations and 36,000 deaths from the seasonal flu. The people most at risk are young children, older adults, pregnant women and persons with chronic illness.

Flu Pandemic: A flu pandemic is different than seasonal flu. A pandemic occurs when a disease spreads rapidly, affecting most countries and regions of the world. Influenza pandemics occur periodically throughout history. There have been three other pandemics during the last century (1918, 1957 and 1968). A pandemic occurs when a virus emerges that is so different from previous strains that few people have immunity against it. The 1918 flu, considered the worst pandemic in recorded history, killed an estimated 50 million people worldwide, including 675,000 in the United States.

It is difficult to predict the evolution of a virus which is why the federal government and public health experts remain concerned about the H1N1 virus. Factors such as urbanization, travel and global interconnectedness may worsen the impact, though others such as better detection systems, prevention strategies, antiviral drugs, and vaccines may minimize the effect. It is still too early to determine how this pandemic will proceed. While most people have experienced only mild symptoms, additional waves of more severe symptoms are possible. This is what happened with the 1918 flu pandemic.

2009 H1N1 Flu (“Swine Flu”) Outbreak: In April of 2009, a mysterious illness was identified in Mexico City. During the previous month, approximately 35-50 people per day had been treated in emergency rooms for respiratory symptoms. Around the same time, children in California were becoming infected with similar symptoms. Cultures sent to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) laboratory revealed a new flu virus that had typically only been seen previously in people who had had direct contact with pigs. On June 11, the World Health Organization declared a pandemic due to widespread case reports of the H1N1 virus.

Current Status of H1N1Flu: The H1N1 flu pandemic continues to evolve. Illness associated with the H1N1 virus continued through the summer months. More illness is expected this fall and winter. The primary strain circulating in Connecticut is the 2009 pandemic influenza A (H1N1) virus. As of October 7, there have been 2,030 laboratory-confirmed cases among Connecticut residents. One hundred and forty six people in the state have been hospitalized for H1N1 related illnesses and ten have died. There have been 47 confirmed cases in Bristol and six 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.

Recommendations to Prevent the Spread of H1N1 Flu: At this time, recommended responses to the H1N1 virus continue to focus on hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette, routine cleaning, and separating ill persons. If you are sick, you should stay home from school or work.

In a pandemic, the goal is to vaccinate everyone. Initially, those people who are at greatest risk will receive the vaccine first as defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) . These target groups include healthy children between the ages of 2 and 4, people who live with or care for children younger than 6 months of age, and healthcare and emergency medical services personnel.

An initial shipment of approximately 20,000 doses of the intranasal H1N1 vaccine has arrived in Connecticut, with another 20,000 doses of the injectable vaccine expected to arrive shortly. More vaccine of both types is expected to arrive in the state on a regular basis. The intranasal vaccine is federally approved for healthy people ages 2 to 49 years except pregnant women.

Residents (or the parent/guardian) in these priority groups should contact their healthcare provider to determine if they will be administering the vaccine. If the individual does not have a provider or if the health care facility does not have the vaccine, the CT DPH hotline can be called to learn more about where/when the vaccine will be available. **The hotline number is 1- 800-830-9426** and is open Monday through Friday from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. In addition, information regarding vaccine distribution can be found on the CT Department of Public Health website at www.ct.gov/ctfluwatch. Over the next few weeks, vaccine distribution will include additional priority groups. Once again, these priority groups will be established by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Because the 1976 swine flu virus and the novel H1N1 virus are different, it is unlikely that a person vaccinated in 1976 will have full protection. Persons aged 65 and older may have some immunity to the H1N1 virus. However, as more vaccine becomes available, people over the age of 65 should receive the vaccine as well.

Seasonal Flu Vaccine: The seasonal flu vaccine does not appear to protect against the H1N1 flu. Therefore, it is recommended that people receive both vaccines. The seasonal flu vaccine is especially important for the anyone 50 years of age or older, children 6 months of age to 18 years old, people with chronic diseases of the lungs or diabetes, kidney and blood cell diseases and health care workers and others in contact with high risk groups. More information about seasonal flu clinics can be found on the CT Department of Public Health website at www.ct.gov/ctfluwatch.

Take Home Messages: Wash hands often and well. Cover coughs and sneezes. Don't share personal items. Stay home if sick. Limit contact with others who are sick. Get vaccinated. Plan and prepare. Stay informed.

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