

Notice from Washington County Health Department

Flu isn't business as usual this year – Be Informed

The Health Department and the Washington County Health Care Partners Coalition are preparing for the arrival of H1N1 influenza vaccine this fall. The exact dates of when the new vaccine will be available are not yet known. Most health care providers are planning to offer vaccine for the novel H1N1 virus as well as seasonal flu vaccine. CDC recommends protection with both seasonal and the new novel H1N1 vaccine.

There are steps that everyone can take now to avoid getting the flu such as covering your cough, washing your hands and staying home when ill. These common sense measures help you protect yourself and others from communicable diseases. If you do have a fever, cough or sore throat, call your health care provider to discuss possible anti-viral medication. If you need to be seen, ask your clinic or doctor's office what infection control preventative measures they recommend as you schedule your appointment. It is important not to expose others in the lobby or waiting areas.

Helpful advice to consider now includes the following:

- Have a plan for sick children who need to stay home or if their school is closed
- Talk to your child about the flu to decrease fear and ensure they have accurate information
- Have supplies on hand for illness care such as a thermometer and fever reducing medication recommended by your health care provider for specific age groups
- Keep regular recommended appointments with health care providers for pregnancy, well baby visits, age appropriate immunizations and chronic disease control
- Get the annual seasonal flu vaccine – H1N1 vaccine does not replace it

The CDC on July 29th recommended that H1N1 vaccination efforts focus on 5 key groups when the vaccine becomes available. Public Health vaccination efforts are designed to help reduce the impact and spread of the virus. The key groups include those who are at highest risk of disease or complications, those who are likely to come in contact with the virus, and those who could infect young infants. These 5 groups include:

- ✓ Pregnant women
- ✓ People who live with or care for children younger than 6 months of age
- ✓ Health care and emergency services personnel
- ✓ Persons between the ages of 6 months and 24 years of age
- ✓ People from ages 25 through 64 who are at higher risk because of chronic health disorders or compromised immune systems

Vaccine availability and demand can be unpredictable and if supply is limited latter in the year, then the CDC recommends the following groups receive vaccine before others:

- Pregnant women
- People who live with or care for children younger than 6 months of age (they are too young to be protected with vaccine themselves)
- Health care and emergency personnel with direct patient contact
- Children 6 months through 4 years of age
- Children 5 - 18 years of age who have chronic medical conditions

Once vaccine is provided to those in the priority groups wanting it, those 25 through 64 years old can be vaccinated and then persons age 65 and older should be vaccinated. Current studies indicate the risk for infection amongst persons aged 65 or older is less than the risk for younger age groups. Stay alert for announcements of time and dates of vaccine availability. Clinics may have special times for client H1N1 vaccination so call for information after the media announces vaccine is shipping. Resources that will be updated include: www.cdc.gov www.pandemic.wisconsin.gov www.co.washington.wi.us/chn

Call the Washington County Health Department at 262-335-4462 for more information. "

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