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2009 H1N1 FLU UPDATE: Monday November 2, 2009 **Flu Surveillance - ALERT**

The Albany County Department of Health (ACDOH) continues to see widespread influenza-like illness reported by health care providers, Emergency Departments, schools and colleges in Albany County and in the Capital Region. Sales of over-the-counter influenza medications at local pharmacies remain increased.

In Albany County, many schools are reporting high rates of absenteeism (above the 8% threshold) due to influenza-like illness. One school closed on Thursday and Friday of last week due to operational difficulties related to high absenteeism.

Hospitals in Albany County and hospital primary care clinics have been busy with increased volume of patients with influenza-like illness (ILI). Fairly significant numbers of ILI patients have been evaluated in the ED with several being admitted. Clinics are also experiencing very high call volume.

Several issues facing hospitals relates to identifying areas for inpatient surge capacity, particularly pediatric and critical care, and the establishment of alternate care sites within or near the hospital, should demand for patient care continue to increase. Also, hospitals are receiving an extremely high volume of calls looking for H1N1 vaccine. The public should be aware that hospitals do not have H1N1 vaccine for administration to the general public. As a measure to further protect their patients and staff from the spread of influenza, all hospitals in the Capital Region have implemented visitor restrictions.

Nationally, the H1N1 influenza virus continues to be the dominant flu virus circulating at this time. Forty eight states, including New York State, are currently reporting widespread influenza activity.

Flu Vaccination Information

The NYS DOH established a vaccine ordering process that went into effect beginning on October 20th and enabled registered health care providers to place orders for H1N1 vaccine for their practices. Healthcare providers in Albany County who registered to receive H1N1 vaccine have begun receiving relatively small shipments from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

As national H1N1 vaccine supplies continue to be markedly limited due to production delays, it is expected that each healthcare provider will only be receiving around 100-200 doses for their practice, far less than the amount they ordered. It is anticipated that greater quantities will soon be available to vaccinate individuals in the target groups (see http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/vaccination/public/vaccination_qa_pub.htm). Residents who are in the target groups should stay in touch with their medical providers to obtain information about getting vaccinated. Please remember that providers are doing their best to respond to the demand and their inability to offer vaccine is due to the national shortage.

In response to feedback from healthcare providers in Albany County last week, the majority of H1N1 vaccine will continue to be delivered to their practices for administration to their patients. Consequently the ACDOH will not be receiving adequate amounts of vaccine to conduct frequent public H1N1 flu vaccination clinics. The ACDOH did not receive H1N1 vaccine last week and is expecting to receive some vaccine this week from an order placed on October 26.

When vaccine is available, ACDOH will hold more public clinics to complement the vaccination being done by healthcare providers. Please understand that we will make every effort to offer vaccine to target groups in a fair and equitable manner.

There does not appear to be any more encouraging news about supplies of **seasonal** flu vaccine. As noted last week, it is uncertain if more vaccine will become available for the 2009-2010 season. You can visit the NYS DOH website for flu vaccine locators and check our website at www.albanycounty.com/health for more information about flu vaccine availability. Also, when you check with your provider about H1N1 vaccine, inquire about seasonal vaccine as well.

Public Information: H1N1 Influenza Pediatric Death

Last week the Albany County Department of Health (ACDOH) was notified that an adolescent died from complications related to a longstanding underlying medical condition. It was also reported that the individual had an influenza-like illness prior to death. Today the department received confirmation of the presence of H1N1 influenza in the individual that might have been a contributing factor. This is the first death in Albany County that is linked to H1N1 influenza since the H1N1 outbreak began in April.

In a press release issued today Dr. James Crucetti, Albany County Health Commissioner, said: "A pediatric death is a tragedy and our sincere condolences are extended to the family at this difficult time. This news, while troubling, should not be cause for alarm. The H1N1 virus continues to be a predominately mild illness and this fatality does not mean the H1N1 virus has changed to cause more severe illness."

The majority of children who have died from H1N1 influenza in the United States have had an underlying medical condition that puts them at increased risk for complications if they get the flu, as was the case with the Albany County youth. Most individuals who have H1N1 influenza do not have serious illness. Fortunately, hospitalizations and fatalities are relatively rare.

Last week the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that H1N1 influenza accounted for 19 pediatric deaths in the United States. Forty eight states are currently reporting widespread influenza activity. In New York State H1N1 influenza is widespread. As of October 24, there have been 10 pediatric deaths in New York State due to H1N1 influenza.

Individuals who are at increased risk of complications* if they contract the flu should contact their healthcare provider if they develop an influenza-like illness. Antiviral medication is available for such individuals.

***Individuals who are at risk for complications of the flu include:**

- Children younger than 2 years old;
- Adults 65 years of age or older
- Pregnant women and women up to 2 weeks postpartum (including following pregnancy loss)
- Persons with the following conditions:
- Chronic pulmonary (including asthma), cardiovascular (except hypertension), renal, hepatic, hematological (including sickle cell disease), or metabolic disorders (including diabetes mellitus);

- Disorders that that can compromise respiratory function or the handling of respiratory secretions or that can increase the risk for aspiration (e.g., cognitive dysfunction, spinal cord injuries, seizure disorders, or other neuromuscular disorders)
- Immunosuppression, including that caused by medications or by HIV
- Persons younger than 19 years of age who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy.

If you would like to subscribe to or be removed from this list please e-mail BeReady@AlbanyCounty.com and insert "Remove from Weekly Update" in subject line.

More resources for more information about seasonal flu and H1N1 flu:

The Albany County Department of Health
www.albanycounty.com/health

Call Albany County's 24-hour automated flu hotline at (518) 447-4505

The New York State Department of Health H1N1 flu hotline at 1-800-808-1987

www.flu.gov