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2009 H1N1 FLU UPDATE: Wednesday, November 25, 2009

Staying Well for the Holidays- Have a Happy and Healthy Thanksgiving

During this time of year many people are traveling, getting together with friends and family for the holidays and gathering in crowded public settings such as shopping malls. These social events create new opportunities to spread illness and for people to get sick with the flu. Flu activity remains higher than expected for this time of year. Therefore, it is particularly important to remember the steps you can take to protect yourself and those around you from getting sick.

- Try to avoid close contact with people who have flu-like symptoms.
- Always cover your coughs and sneezes with either a tissue or with your elbow joint of your arm and not bare hands. Throw tissues in the wastebasket.
- **Wash your hands often with soap and warm water** or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer to keep yourself from protected from germs you might come in contact with and to keep others healthy if you have flu-like symptoms.
- Keep your hands away from your eyes, nose and mouth. That is how germs spread.
- If you have a fever with a cough or sore throat, stay home until your symptoms have resolved and until you have been free of fever for at least one day without the use of fever-reducing medicines.
- Get the H1N1 vaccine if you are in one of the target groups as soon as vaccine is available to you.
- Keep looking for seasonal flu vaccine and get it if possible

Vaccine Information for People 65 years and Older

The initial five target groups established by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to receive the 2009 H1N1 influenza vaccine include people who are at high risk of experiencing complications from the 2009 H1N1 influenza. These groups include pregnant women, those aged 6 months through 24 years, and adults aged 25 through 64 years with an underlying medical condition. Many people who are 65 years of age and older have wondered why they are being asked to wait to be vaccinated with the 2009 H1N1 influenza vaccine, since typically they are a priority for the seasonal influenza vaccine. All the data available since the 2009 H1N1 influenza virus was first identified indicates that the virus primarily affects

people younger than 65 year old, with the majority of cases, hospitalizations and deaths occurring in people 64 years and younger. This is very different from what is seen with seasonal influenza.

Although people aged 65 years and older are asked to wait to receive the 2009 H1N1 vaccine until after these target groups are vaccinated, they are still recommended to get the seasonal influenza vaccine as soon as possible and of course, take other common-sense precautions such as frequent hand washing and staying away from sick people.

FLU VACCINATION INFORMATION

This week the Albany County Department of Health (ACDOH) held two public H1N1 vaccination clinics, one on Sunday, November 22nd at the Times Union Center and the other on Tuesday, November 24th at the Berne Knox Westerlo Elementary School. Nearly 2000 people from the initial five target groups were vaccinated.

The national H1N1 vaccine supply continues to be limited and is being released in small amounts on a weekly basis to local health departments, hospitals and healthcare providers. The ACDOH is planning to hold additional public vaccination clinics in December and January as more vaccine becomes available locally. The timing and location of these clinics is yet to be determined. It is our intention to hold vaccination clinics in varied locations throughout Albany County to provide access to all residents. For individuals in the target groups who are eligible to be vaccinated for 2009 H1N1 influenza, we recommend that you contact your primary care provider or attend one of the public clinics when they are scheduled. For updated information regarding future public clinics please continue to check our website at www.albanycounty.com/health.

All children aged 9 years and younger who receive the 2009 H1N1 influenza vaccine will need to receive a second dose, at least 28 days after the initial dose, to obtain maximum protection from illness. This dose can be received at any time after 28 days, although sooner is better. Children who have received their first dose at one of our public vaccination clinics can receive their second dose either from their primary care provider or at a subsequent public vaccination clinic. As increased supplies of H1N1 vaccine are expected to be available in December, there should be ample opportunities to obtain the booster dose. Please be advised that the ACDOH is not specifically holding vaccine or reserving slots for children who need their booster. We recommend parents and caregivers check our website for future clinics and schedule an appointment for this dose, when appropriate.

FLU SURVEILLANCE

Albany County Influenza Surveillance – Key Findings:

- » The overall level of flu activity in Albany County continues to remain at high levels but has not increased significantly when compared to the previous week.
- » While most Albany County residents with flu are experiencing mild to moderate illness, a number of residents have been hospitalized due to more severe illness or complications caused by the flu. The majority of residents hospitalized with flu also have pre-existing underlying medical conditions.
- » Last week, an H1N1 influenza-related death was reported in an adult Albany County resident. As is the case with seasonal influenza, the H1N1 flu can, and occasionally

does, cause serious illness and death. Two-thirds of the deaths from 2009 H1N1 have occurred in persons with pre-existing underlying medical conditions such as asthma or diabetes. Given the vast number of individuals who are or have been ill with H1N1 influenza, deaths related to influenza continue to remain a relatively rare occurrence.

» Emergency Departments and Urgent Care Centers continue to report seeing high levels of patients with influenza-like illness (ILI) but, the numbers have not increased significantly compared to the previous week. Healthcare providers in Albany County also report continued high levels of visits and phone calls concerning influenza issues.

» All laboratories (hospital, commercial and private) are reporting positive flu test results. 99% of positive influenza A lab test results that are subtyped in New York State continue to be the H1N1 strain. Nationally, a few seasonal influenza strains have begun co-circulating at low levels with the 2009 H1N1 influenza strain. However, seasonal flu viruses have not yet been detected in NYS this flu season, only the 2009 H1N1 strain.

» Schools in Albany County are still reporting isolated pockets of high rates of ILI. However, the overall rate of absenteeism in schools due to ILI began to decrease early in November and the downward trend appears to be continuing.

» Nationally, 43 states, including New York State, are reporting widespread influenza activity; a decline of three states over last week. Additional information about flu surveillance in the U.S. is available from the CDC website FluView at www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly/.

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