

NEWS RELEASE

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Local Perspective on Swine and Seasonal Flu

By

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With all we've heard on the national scene about the coming flu season, what does it mean for us in West Central Ohio? I think the most important thing is to let people know that there are things we know and things we don't know. As time passes, we will know more and we will let people know what those updates are.

There are two areas of concern in flu season, the regular season flu, that mostly affects older people, and the H1N1 (Swine) flu, which mainly affects younger people and pregnant women. Let's take this, then, in two parts. First, the seasonal flu.

Seasonal flu shots are expected to go on as normal this year. Flu shots should be available at the beginning of October. The supply is stable and reliable. I would urge the usual groups of people (over aged 65, small children and persons with compromised immune systems) to get that vaccine as early as possible this year. It should be available at the same places that were available last year – the health district, doctor's offices, several pharmacies and some retail stores. The Miami County Health District will hold their seasonal flu clinic the week of October 5th. The first day will be from 10 a.m. until 6:30 p.m. and the rest of the week will be from 9 a.m. until 3 p.m. We would encourage people to get that vaccine earlier so that they don't get caught in the crossfire of those getting the H1N1 vaccine.

The groups that are targeted to get the H1N1 vaccine are mostly (but not all) different from the seasonal flu. H1N1 flu mostly affects pregnant women and children. People older than aged 64 are at very low risk of catching the H1N1 virus. No one knows why.

Q. Who will be recommended as priority groups to receive the novel H1N1 vaccine?

On July 29, 2009, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP)—an advisory committee to CDC—recommended that novel H1N1 flu vaccine be made available first to the following five groups:

- Pregnant women
- Health care workers and emergency medical responders
- People caring for infants under 6 months of age
- Children and young adults from 6 months to 24 years
- People aged 25 to 64 years with underlying medical conditions (e.g. asthma, diabetes)

Q. When will novel H1N1 vaccine be available?

The CDC tells us that they should begin shipping the H1N1 vaccine by mid-October. Experience tells us that we will only be getting partial shipments over a long period of time. We will not be scheduling any vaccine administration to the priority groups of people until we actually have physical possession of the vaccine.

Q. Who will administer the vaccine?

As of this writing, all of the vaccine will be shipped to local health districts. They may in turn give some to community partners, such as doctor's offices and pharmacies. There are details of chain of custody, reporting and refrigeration requirements to be worked out. Stay tuned for more details.

Q. Where will the shots be given?

The local health districts have many options available to them. They could be given at their own clinics in the Hobart Center for County Government in Troy, or at schools, pharmacies, doctor's offices, and workplaces. Stay tuned for details.

Q. How many shots will be necessary?

Testing is still going on to see how much vaccine it takes to boost one's immune system enough to be effective. Preliminary results state that it may be two shots, possibly three weeks apart. Once again, stay tuned.

Q. What will it cost the consumer for the H1N1 shots?

The federal government is paying for the vaccine and supplies to administer it. There may or may not be a small nominal charge for the administration of it.

Q. I am over age 65. Can I get the H1N1 vaccine shots?

If there is any vaccine left after all of the other groups and their demands have been satisfied, then the vaccine can be administered to anyone else outside the original risk groups mentioned previously. At this point in time, we have no idea how many people who are eligible to receive it will actually receive it. Only time will tell. Once again, stay tuned.

Q. How bad will the H1N1 season be?

No one knows for sure. History is the only accurate predictor of the future. While we have some history from Spring 2008 until now, we haven't yet been through an indoor season, when

flu is generally at its worst. From what we do know, this virus appears to strike the young and healthy, but they also have the best chance of survival. So far, of those who have been documented to have caught the flu and have been hospitalized, the fatality rate is in the neighborhood of less than one-half of one percent. This number may be high as most people who get the flu do not seek medical attention and thereby go uncounted.

Q. How can I stay up to date with information?

Your local health district will send out news release periodically and also post them on their web site at www.miamicountyhealth.net. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has an excellent website with much more detail and is very up to date. Find them at www.cdc.gov/flu.