

H1N1 Key Messages for Monday, Jan. 25, 2010

from the Oregon Division of Health

Flu activity could continue for months, caused by either pandemic H1N1 or regular seasonal influenza viruses, though the level of activity is unpredictable. Right now is the window of opportunity for more people to receive 2009 H1N1 vaccine.

Nationally, visits to the doctor and hospitalization for the flu are declining, and deaths attributed to flu have decreased and are below what is expected for this time of year. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, almost all influenza viruses identified so far continue to be pandemic H1N1.

The best way to prevent another wave of H1N1 is by vaccination. Oregon's supply of H1N1 vaccine is now keeping up with demand. The H1N1 vaccine is widely available at pharmacies, chain stores, private health care providers and public clinics.

Vaccination is the very best way to protect yourself and those you care about from the flu.

Children between 6 months through 9 years of age need to receive two doses of H1N1 vaccine about one month apart. Parents should make sure their children get the second dose, even if it has been longer than a month since the first.

The H1N1 vaccine is made by the same process and manufacturers as the seasonal flu vaccine. Continuous testing shows that the H1N1 vaccine is safe and effective for everyone, including pregnant women and children older than 6 months.

Oregon Public Health's Emerging Infections Program (EIP) network released preliminary findings on H1N1 activity in Oregon from Sept. 1, 2009 through January 11, 2010, which confirmed that the majority of adults and children hospitalized from the flu in the tri-county area of Multnomah, Clackamas and Washington counties had underlying health conditions such as asthma, lung disease or diabetes. According to the data, 33 pregnant women were hospitalized from the flu this season, compared with an average of less than one woman during each of the last five flu seasons. A pregnant woman with the flu was hospitalized 4.4 times more often than non-pregnant women in the same age group.

The EIP's mortality figures, based on lab-confirmed flu cases from across the state between September 1, 2009 and January 11, 2010, show that the median age of adult flu cases in Oregon is 51; over half (57%) of the deaths were male and 84% were white.

People at high risk for complications from the flu – pregnant women, young children and people with underlying health conditions – should get vaccinated right away. It's also important to follow the everyday prevention methods: wash your hands, cover your cough and stay home when you're sick.