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2009 H1N1 FLU UPDATE: Wednesday, December 2, 2009

Riding the Pandemic Flu “Wave”

Historically, influenza pandemics have been characterized by multiple waves of illness. Initially the pandemic causes a rise in influenza disease activity which peaks and then decreases with time, forming the first wave. This is typically followed by several successive waves of influenza illness at varying time intervals. With the 2009 H1N1 influenza pandemic there was an initial wave this past spring and we are currently experiencing the second wave. At this time surveillance reports across the United States, New York State, and in Albany County, indicate that H1N1 influenza-related disease activity is beginning to decline but it continues to remain higher than expected for this time of year (see following section on Flu Surveillance for more details).

As the second wave of 2009 H1N1 influenza subsides, history teaches us that we need to be prepared for another wave of increased disease activity, although it is difficult to predict the exact pattern that each pandemic will take. Many public health officials anticipate another wave of illness this coming winter or spring. This may coincide with the traditional flu season or result in a prolonged flu season. Therefore, it is important to continue to do all we can to protect ourselves from getting ill with the flu, even during the periods of low disease activity between the waves. Individuals who are in the recommended target groups are encouraged to **get vaccinated** as soon as the H1N1 vaccine is available for their age and target group.

FLU VACCINATION INFORMATION

The national H1N1 vaccine supply remains limited and is being released in small amounts on a weekly basis to local health departments, hospitals and healthcare providers. The Albany County Department of Health (ACDOH) works to assure that the majority of the county's limited per capita allotment of vaccine goes to participating healthcare providers to make available to their patients. The supply of nasal H1N1 vaccine has been more readily available than injectable vaccine. Nasal vaccine is an option for healthy, non-pregnant patients aged 2 through 49 years who are in the initial target groups.

Colleges and universities in Albany County have also received vaccine, as most students are included in the initial target groups recommended for vaccination. College students are encouraged to get vaccinated through their college/university vaccination clinics. We recommend those who did not have an opportunity to be vaccinated during the fall semester contact their primary care providers during winter break and receive the vaccine before returning to school.

The ACDOH is planning to hold two public vaccination clinics in the upcoming week. These clinics will be by appointment only for Albany County residents who are in one of the initial target groups as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Each clinic will serve a different subset of the target groups as listed below.

Saturday, December 5th, 2009, from 9:30 AM to 12:30 PM at the Cohoes Middle School located at 7 Bevan Street in Cohoes.

Target groups served:

- Persons aged 4 to 24 years,
- Persons aged 25 to 64 years who have medical conditions that put them at higher risk for flu-related complications,
- Pregnant women,
- Persons aged 4 years and older who live with or provide care for infants under 6 months of age (e.g. parents, siblings, and daycare providers), and
- Health care and emergency medical services personnel.

Wednesday, December 9th, 2009, from 4 PM to 7 PM at the Albany County Department of Health located at 175 Green Street in Albany.

Target group served:

- Children aged 6 months through 47 months.

Both clinics are **by appointment only**. Individuals can register online at www.albanycounty.com/health or by phone at 518-447-4505. Phones are open weekdays 8:30 am to 4:30 pm.

It is our intention to continue to hold H1N1 public vaccination clinics in varied locations throughout Albany County to provide access to all residents in the target groups as more vaccine becomes available. 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 or call our Flu Information line at 518-447-4505.

FLU SURVEILLANCE

Albany County Influenza Surveillance – Key Findings:

» Flu activity in Albany County decreased significantly in the past week when compared to the previous week. However, while influenza activity has decreased, it still remains high for this time of year.

» While most Albany County residents with flu are experiencing mild to moderate illness, the number of residents hospitalized due to more severe illness or complications caused by the flu continues to remain at higher levels compared to what is usually expected for this time of year. The majority of residents hospitalized with flu also have pre-existing underlying medical conditions.

» Last week, another H1N1 influenza-related death was reported in an adult Albany County resident. The patient had a pre-existing underlying medical condition. 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 reported significant *decreases* in the number of patients seen with influenza-like illness (ILI) last week. Healthcare providers in Albany County also reported a decrease in the number 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 reporting absenteeism rates *below* the baseline level of 8%. Absenteeism from influenza-like illness appeared to peak in late October in Albany County schools and has steadily decreased since that time.

» Nationally, 32 states, including New York State, are reporting widespread influenza activity; a decline of 11 states over last week. Regional influenza activity was reported by 17 states, and local influenza activity was reported by one state. National reports of influenza activity are an indication of the geographic spread of influenza viruses and do not measure the severity of influenza activity. 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