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CITY OF MILWAUKEE TO RECEIVE 2009 INFLUENZA A (H1N1) VACCINE FOR HEALTHCARE WORKERS

Health Officials say first doses of intranasal vaccine to arrive this week

Milwaukee healthcare workers will be among the first in Wisconsin to receive the 2009 Influenza A (H1N1) vaccine expected to arrive this week in Wisconsin and throughout the nation, health officials said Monday.

The City of Milwaukee Health Department says it will receive H1N1 nasal spray vaccine for use in healthcare workers younger than 49 who do not have any underlying chronic medical conditions. Public health officials say the H1N1 vaccine is made the same way as regular seasonal flu vaccine, and has a similar safety and efficacy profile. They encourage all healthcare workers to get vaccinated as soon as possible.

“It is extremely important that health care workers receive their novel H1N1 vaccinations now” said Commissioner of Health Bevan K. Baker. “Unvaccinated health care workers are an important avenue of disease transmission to our community’s most vulnerable individuals. Further, vaccinating health care workers protects them from illness, which allows them to continue caring for those who need their care the most.”

Wisconsin was among the 25 states and large cities that placed their initial order for vaccine on September 30, 2009. The vaccine that arrives in the state will be distributed to local public health departments and larger health care systems throughout the state for vaccination of health care professions who care for sick individuals or who will assist with vaccinating others.

Additional H1N1 doses for vaccination of those at high risk for complications from the disease are expected to arrive in Milwaukee in mid-October. Vaccine should be available at private healthcare providers before the end of the month. In addition, the Health Department will hold mass clinics to vaccinate those in priority groups as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. These groups include persons high at risk for severe illness or complications related to H1N1 flu infection such as pregnant women, persons 6 months thru 24 years of age, persons caregiving for young infants <6 months of age and persons 25-64 years of age with chronic underlying disease.

Getting a flu shot is the most effective way to prevent infection and to prevent spread of the illness. This year, there is need for protection against both seasonal influenza and the new H1N1 flu.

People should get the novel H1N1 flu vaccine *in addition* to the regular seasonal influenza vaccine because the regular seasonal flu vaccine will not protect against the novel 2009 H1N1 flu.

“I urge all residents to get a seasonal flu shot now, and the novel H1N1 vaccine when it is available,” said Mayor Tom Barrett. “By getting your flu shots, you’ll reduce your risk of illness this winter and you’ll be less likely to spread disease to others.”

Think Health. Act Now!

H1N1 flu, like regular seasonal influenza, spreads person to person when a person infected with the flu coughs or sneezes and the uninfected person breathes in the virus. Staying home when ill is very important to prevent exposing high-risk individuals, such as pregnant women or people with weak immune systems, to this new virus.

Currently, City of Milwaukee Health Department surveillance indicates that influenza-like illness is at moderate levels within the community and surrounding regions and has been increasing significantly over the past several weeks. Health officials define “Influenza-like illness” as fever plus either cough or sore throat. Other symptoms of influenza can include runny or stuffy nose, fatigue, headache, muscle aches, and sometimes even vomiting or diarrhea.

Health officials again stressed that persons with mild illness whose condition is not worsening should call their doctor to find out if antiviral treatment is needed. Many of these types of cases can be managed easily over the phone and do not require visits to a doctor’s office. Calling over the phone first will prevent unnecessary exposure to other patients in these types of settings. The City of Milwaukee Health Department does not advise persons with mild symptoms to go to a hospital emergency department unless instructed to do so by their doctor or if symptoms become severe.

In addition to vaccination, other ways to stay healthy and to protect yourself and those around you from getting the flu include:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with your upper sleeve. If you use a tissue, throw it away after one use.
- Avoid being exposed to people who are sick with flu-like symptoms.
- Stay home when you are sick to prevent exposing others to your illness.
- Eat nutritious meals, get plenty of rest, and do not smoke.

Updates and further information on H1N1 flu is available on www.milwaukee.gov/flu or by calling 211.