



Nov. 13, 2009

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Oregon Public Health focuses H1N1 influenza vaccine outreach

As the H1N1 influenza outbreak continues in Oregon, the latest local and national data are emerging about how the virus affects certain populations. As a result — and because of the limited amount of vaccine — over the next few weeks the Oregon Public Health Division and county public health departments and tribes will target vaccination education and outreach on the populations that are most at risk for hospitalization and death.

Since Sept. 1, 2009, 1,044 people have been hospitalized in Oregon with influenza-like illness; 34 people have died. In Oregon, five children have died from influenza, four of the children had special needs — two with cerebral palsy. Two Oregon children died outside the hospital.

“Children with special needs must get vaccinated; if they get sick, parents should seek care early,” says Mel Kohn, M.D., M.P.H., Oregon public health director.

National statistics show that over 90 percent of people hospitalized with H1N1 are within the priority group: pregnant women, children 5 and under, and people aged 5 – 64 with underlying health conditions, such as asthma, diabetes and cardio-pulmonary disease.

“People with underlying health conditions are much more likely to have a severe case of H1N1 influenza that could require hospitalization,” says Kohn. “We are asking this high-risk group to please make sure and get vaccinated early in order to protect themselves.”

(more)

Oregon has so far received about 25 percent of the vaccine allocation necessary to reach all people in the targeted population for vaccine, and more vaccine is coming every day.

“Until we have enough vaccine, getting it to the most vulnerable people is a constant balancing act,” says Kathleen O’Leary, Washington County Public Health administrator and chair of the Conference of Local Health Officials.

Public health officials are encouraging vaccine providers to reach out to the populations that are at the highest risk for complications from H1N1 flu, including people of all ages with heart and lung diseases and children with neurodevelopmental diseases. These general classes are emerging as the most important risk factors both nationally and in Oregon. “That’s why we are emphasizing today the importance of ensuring that people with chronic conditions get vaccinated,” says Kohn.

In Oregon, some of the more common underlying health conditions that make people most at risk for hospitalization and death from H1N1 flu are:

- In children under 18, asthma;
- In adults over 18, asthma, diabetes and pregnancy as well as all cardio-pulmonary diseases;
- Of all the people hospitalized with influenza in the tri-county area (Multnomah, Clackamas and Washington counties) since Sept. 1, 2009, 33 percent have asthma as an underlying condition.
- Many people who have been hospitalized with H1N1 suffer from multiple underlying health conditions.

For more information, visit www.flu.oregon.gov or call the Oregon Public Health flu hotline at 1-800-978-3040.

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