



December 11, 2009

Media questions: Christine Decker Stone, (desk) 971-673-1282, (cell) 503-602-8027, Christine.l.stone@state.or.us; Alissa Bateman-Robbins, 503-490-6590

Oregon Public Health officials to make H1N1 vaccine available to everyone

Oregon Public Health officials are making the H1N1 vaccine available to everyone beginning Monday, December 14. Previously the vaccine had been prioritized to groups most at risk from H1N1 influenza.

"We have been hearing for some time that people outside the federally guided target group are very interested in getting vaccinated," says Mel Kohn, M.D., M.P.H., director of Oregon Public Health Division. "We've received a substantial amount of vaccine, and more is flowing into Oregon at a brisk pace, so it makes sense to open up it up to all."

While cases of H1N1 flu have dropped off over the past few weeks, there is a good possibility that additional waves of illness may occur over the next few months. Health officials continue to urge people to get vaccinated to prevent problems later this winter.

"Local county health departments will continue working to get vaccine directed to a variety of providers so that, as vaccine continues to be shipped, the public will be able to get immunized," says Kathleen O'Leary, administrator of the Washington County Public Health Division and chairwoman of the Conference of Local Health Officials. "Private healthcare providers, retail pharmacies and local public health clinics will be receiving vaccine to administer. I am very pleased that we can now provide this protection to more Oregonians."

(more)

Kohn and O'Leary advise that people check the flu vaccine locator on Oregon Public Health's flu Web site (www.flu.oregon.gov) to find out where vaccine will be available in the coming weeks in their area.

"During the busy holiday season, finding the time to get vaccinated can be challenging," Kohn says. "Now that everyone will be eligible to get vaccinated it will be more convenient for multiple family members to get vaccinated at once, and that can save you some time."

Kohn recommends that everyone get vaccinated, but adds that it's still especially important that those at high risk for complications from flu do so. "H1N1 flu is not a gift any of us want to get or give this holiday season."

As of today Oregon expects to have received 891,716 doses of H1N1 vaccine. In the past week Oregon received 126,208 doses.

Many other states have either expanded eligibility already, or are considering doing so in the near future.

More information on the flu pandemic and a vaccine locator are available on Oregon Public Health's Web site, www.flu.oregon.gov. Those with flu-related questions, such as how to care for someone who has the flu or when to see a health care provider, also can get their questions answered by a nurse at the state's flu hotline, 1-800-978-3040.

#