



October 29, 2009

How widespread is H1N1 (Swine) FLU?

During the month of October, influenza activity has continued to increase in the United States. Flu activity is now widespread in 46 states. Nationwide, visits to doctors for influenza-like-illness are increasing steeply and are now higher than what is seen at the peak of many regular flu seasons. In addition, flu-related hospitalizations and deaths continue to go up nation-wide and are above what is expected for this time of year. The schools are reporting a large number of children with influenza like illnesses with consequent higher than average absenteeism rates. We are working closely with all school districts to manage this situation.

What is the vaccine status?

About two weeks ago the CDC announced a delay in the manufacturing and distribution of the H1N1 vaccine. Because of the unanticipated delay, the initial distribution in vaccine was uneven with some regions receiving more vaccine than others. Three Rivers Health District has received small amounts of vaccine. Nationally and within the state efforts are being made for a more equitable distribution of the vaccine. Others who have received some vaccine are the hospitals and several private vaccinators. Additional vaccine was sent out to the private vaccinators this week.

Given the vaccine status, who should get the vaccine?

The health department is following the CDC's recommendations in vaccinating targeted groups that are at the greatest risk of flu complications. These groups are:

- pregnant_women,
- people who live with or provide care for infants younger than 6 months (e.g., parents, siblings, and day care providers),
- health care and emergency medical services personnel,
- people 6 months through 24 years of age, and,
- people 25 years through 64 years of age who have chronic medical conditions

We have been assured that enough vaccine will be available eventually for all who want to be vaccinated. We are, therefore, requesting people outside of the above groups to step aside for now.

What about school-based vaccinations?

The health department is still planning on doing school-based vaccinations. These clinics have been rescheduled due to the vaccine status mentioned above. We have communicated this information with school superintendents, and will let everyone know as soon as we have adequate vaccine to start these clinics.