



For more information contact:
Toby D. Wagoner, Spokesman
Division of Immunization Services
Telephone: (304) 558-6438

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H1N1 Vaccination is a Good Idea before Holiday Gatherings

Health professionals are encouraging West Virginia residents to get vaccinated now against H1N1 since many families will be congregating to celebrate the holidays in the weeks to come. Persons within the H1N1 target groups that have not been vaccinated should certainly seek vaccine now. In addition, others interested in being vaccinated are also being included in H1N1 vaccination clinics across most of West Virginia. While H1N1 flu-like activity has declined in the state, the virus is still here. Cumulatively, there have been 872 hospitalizations and 19 deaths in West Virginia attributed to H1N1 since September.

Dr. Cathy Slempp, State Health Officer and the physician in charge of leading the state's fight against H1N1, says, "Flu is unpredictable. We certainly could see cases of H1N1 rise again as we gather over holidays and move into traditional flu season. Give yourself and others a holiday gift by staying healthy. Seasonal and H1N1 flu vaccine can protect both you and those you care about."

H1N1 vaccine is currently available in both the private and public sector. Health departments have been using recent increases in H1N1 vaccine supplies to get vaccine to many more private provider offices over the last two weeks. Community pharmacies are also increasingly becoming a source for H1N1 vaccine and will continue to do so in the weeks to come. While high risk populations will always remain a key focus, others interested in reducing risk are also welcome and encouraged to receive the vaccine. To date, 431,800 doses of H1N1 vaccine have been distributed across West Virginia.

West Virginians are not only seeking H1N1 vaccine, but more West Virginians than ever before have likely received seasonal flu vaccine as well. Some seasonal flu vaccine supplies remain, but are harder to come by in many locales because of high uptake earlier in the fall. Those over 65 are especially encouraged to seek seasonal flu vaccine if not yet vaccinated.

The five target groups for H1N1 vaccination are persons age 6 months to 24 years of age, pregnant women, healthcare workers, persons who care for children less than 6 months of age and persons age 25-64 with underlying health issues. More information about H1N1 vaccine is available at www.wvflu.org.