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H1N1 Vaccination Efforts Are Expanding in West Virginia

State officials today announced two new developments in their H1N1 vaccination efforts. First, they have asked local health departments to use recent increases in H1N1 vaccine supplies to get vaccine to many more private provider offices. Secondly, they noted that beginning in mid to late December, H1N1 vaccination clinics will be expanded to include all individuals interested in being vaccinated. While high risk populations will always remain a key focus, others interested in reducing risk will also be able to receive the vaccine at that time. State Health Officer Dr. Cathy Slemp, who is leading the fight against H1N1 in West Virginia, says, "As supplies continue to increase, we're entering a transitional period with how we distribute H1N1 vaccine. We have asked health departments to extend H1N1 vaccine to as many enrolled primary care clinics, pediatricians, OB/GYNs, family practice, internists, and other providers who reach high risk populations as possible during the next two weeks.

Through mid December, public and private providers should continue to vaccinate patients that fall within the H1N1 target groups. As local vaccine supply allows, health departments and others should then move into the next phase of also including anyone else interested in being vaccinated. Slemp expects most West Virginia communities to be able to do this in mid-to-late December.

To date, 375,800 doses of H1N1 vaccine have been distributed. Inclusion of private providers in H1N1 vaccination efforts is not new. The state recommendation to local health departments has always been to extend H1N1 vaccine into the private healthcare sector as much as vaccine supplies allow.

"We are receiving more H1N1 vaccine each week as we expected. As supply increases, we need to further extend that vaccine into the private sector, and we are at that point. Provider offices are great partners and critical for reaching those who can most benefit from vaccine," Slemp said.

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.