



INYO COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH BRIEF

A Division of Health & Human Services
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Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

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Pandemic flu keeps strong grip on US (USA – and Us!)

Nationally:

Pandemic H1N1 flu activity continues its vigorous spread across the United States, with 48 states experiencing widespread activity and reports of 18 more deaths in children last week alone. Though the number of doctor's visits from flulike illnesses decreased slightly from the previous week from 8% of patient visits to 7.7% across the nation, it's difficult to tell if the activity is peaking, as activity waxes and wanes in different areas from week to week.

The CDC (Centers for Disease Control) weekly flu surveillance report released Friday, which covers the week ending Oct 31, revealed:

- Lab-confirmed flu hospitalizations continued to climb.
- Pneumonia and influenza death rates increased for the fifth week in a row.
- Death rates are particularly high for those who are pregnant or obese.
- More than 99% of flu viruses reported to the CDC were the pandemic H1N1 virus.

Locally:

We continue to experience high levels of illness in our communities, as evidenced by increased visits to the Emergency Room or the doctor's office, school absenteeism, and antiviral (Tamiflu) prescriptions. There have been several more hospitalizations, but fortunately no deaths at this time.

Vaccine:

So far manufacturers have made 38 million doses of pandemic H1N1 vaccine available to states, which is up 11 million doses from a week ago. Most of the vaccine shipments coming out now are the injectable version, with about one-third of the supply as the inhaled version.

The more plentiful shipments of injectable vaccine come as good news as public health

scrambles to vaccinate high-risk groups first. If everything goes smoothly an additional 8 million doses should become available to states and localities over the next week.

As the vaccine to prevent the 2009 H1N1 influenza virus has become available in small quantities, the CDC has stressed that the first doses should be given to certain highest-risk groups. The five groups so designated include persons who live with or provide care for infants younger than 6 months, pregnant women, children with chronic medical conditions, children and young adults aged 6 months to 4 years, and healthcare workers and EMS personnel with the potential of face-to-face contact with contagious persons. Your Health Department has been working diligently to identify specific individuals within these groups, and has started to provide vaccination to those persons as vaccine becomes available.

As we get more vaccine, we will expand the target groups to include all children and young adults through age 24, all healthcare workers, and adults with chronic medical conditions up to age 64 years. Eventually, enough vaccine will be available for anyone who wishes to receive it. We are sensitive to the anger and speculation circulating in the media about people who are not at high-risk getting access to vaccine before those who really need it. We can assure you that this has not been the case locally, and our best efforts are being made to distribute the available vaccine in a fair and just manner.

Antiviral options

Though the scarce supply of vaccine in the face of such widespread flu activity is frustrating, antivirals are another very effective tool in fighting the virus. Those who benefit from treatment with antivirals include not just hospitalized patients, but also outpatients with underlying health conditions and any moderately ill patient who appears to be getting worse. Certainly, any pregnant female with flu-like symptoms should contact their healthcare provider immediately to discuss the possibility of treatment.

For more information, contact the Inyo County Health Department at 760-873-7868.

And remember, wash your hands, cover your cough, stay home if you are sick, and keep your sick children out of school and daycare! Do what is right for you, your family, and your community!