

September 17, 2009

Seasonal Flu

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. The height of flu season occurs in winter, and the best way to prevent the flu is by getting a flu vaccination each year.

Seasonal flu vaccines are available through private providers now, and will continue through December, January and beyond.

The following groups have been identified as those that should be prioritized to receive the seasonal flu vaccination:

- ▶ Children aged 6 months—18 years
- ▶ All people aged ≥ 50 years
- ▶ Pregnant and breastfeeding women
- ▶ Other adults at risk for medical complications from influenza.
- ▶ All people who live with or care for people at high risk for influenza-related complications, including contacts of children aged < 6 months

Seasonal Influenza Vaccine Availability and Distribution -

- ▶ Flu Mist (nasal administration) was made available in August, and is for healthy people aged 2-49 years.
- ▶ Injectable vaccine will be available starting in September.
- ▶ Most vaccine recipients will receive their vaccine from a private provider including pharmacists, however, the DHH Office of Public Health will use a federal allotment to help ensure those with high-risk conditions receive the vaccine at local parish health units.
- ▶ The seasonal flu vaccine requires one dose (shot).
- ▶ Although we encourage early flu shots, you can still get your seasonal flu shot in January and still be protected during flu season in Louisiana.

H1N1

H1N1 is a new influenza virus first detected in Americans in April 2009. Its spread has continued throughout the summer of 2009, and the virus spreads in much the same way that regular seasonal influenza viruses spread.

H1N1 flu vaccination should begin as soon as the vaccine is available, most likely mid-to-late October.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends the following priority groups should receive the H1N1 vaccine when it becomes available:

- ▶ Pregnant women
- ▶ People who live with or care for children younger than 6 months of age
- ▶ Health care and emergency medical services personnel
- ▶ People from the ages of 6 months to 24 years
- ▶ People from ages 25 through 64 years who are at higher risk for flu complications because of chronic health disorders or compromised immune systems

H1N1 Vaccine Availability and Distribution -

- ▶ All H1N1 vaccine will be both injectable and intranasal, and will come in both adult and pediatric formulations.
- ▶ Vaccine will be distributed over several months through a network of both private and public providers including pharmacists.
- ▶ Once available, the DHH Office of Public Health will assist in the delivery of vaccine to provider sites that have pre-registered and trained to use the Louisiana Immunization Network for Kids Statewide (LINKS) system, as electronic reporting of administered doses is required.
- ▶ As for now, the H1N1 vaccine will require two doses (shots), three to four weeks apart.
- ▶ Once all high risk persons have been targeted, the campaign will open up to let anyone who wants a vaccine to get one.

The 2009 H1N1 vaccine is NOT intended to replace the seasonal flu vaccine. It is intended to be used alongside seasonal flu vaccine to protect people. Seasonal flu and the first dose of 2009 H1N1 vaccines may be administered on the same day. The seasonal vaccine is available now. The 2009 H1N1 vaccine will be available to select target groups beginning in mid-October. More specific dates cannot be provided at this time as vaccine availability depends on several factors including manufacturing time and time needed to conduct clinical trials.

To help prevent the spread of illness, you can also take the following everyday actions to stay healthy: Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you sneeze or cough, wash your hands often using soap or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth, and stay home if you are sick.