



Columbia County Department of Health

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For Immediate Release:

As H1N1 Flu Activity Increases, Columbia County Health Department Urges Residents to Stay Home When Sick, Follow Other Preventive Measures

Larger Supplies of Vaccine Expected to be Available by Mid-November

With cases of H1N1 flu increasing and not enough vaccine to meet current needs, the Columbia County Health Department is urging residents to stay home if they are sick and follow other preventive measures to limit the spread of the flu.

“Flu activity is currently widespread and increasing across New York State,” said Nancy Winch Public Health Director, noting that almost all of the flu activity so far this fall is caused by the H1N1 flu virus, although seasonal flu is expected to begin circulating later in the flu season.

“While vaccine offers the greatest protection from the flu, there are currently not enough H1N1 flu vaccine supplies to meet the demand due to delays in production reported by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC),” said Ms Winch. “As we wait for vaccine to become more plentiful in the coming weeks, there are important measures Columbia County residents can take to reduce their chances of getting and spreading the flu.”

Ms Winch urged all residents to take the following measures:

- Cough or sneeze into a tissue or the crook of your elbow, not your hands. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if you aren't near a sink.
- Keep your hands away from your eyes, nose and mouth. Flu spreads that way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- Stay home when you are sick, and do not return to school or work until you have been fever-free without medication for at least 24 hours.

“You don't need to go to a hospital emergency department if your illness is mild”. “Most people with the flu have mild to moderate symptoms and recover at home without medical treatment.”

However, Ms Winch emphasized there are times when it is appropriate to seek medical treatment. Any individuals experiencing severe or worsening symptoms should immediately contact their health care providers or go to a hospital, she said.

Signs that medical treatment may be needed for children include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Refusing to drink fluids
- Severe vomiting or diarrhea that won't stop
- Being too irritable to be held
- Bluish skin color
- Flu-like symptoms that improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Fever with a rash

Signs that medical treatment may be needed for adults include:

- Trouble breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or stomach
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe vomiting that won't stop
- Flu-like symptoms that improve but then return with fever and worse cough

It is recommended that individuals at higher risk for serious illness and complications from the flu contact their health care provider at the first sign of the flu to see if it is appropriate for them to be prescribed an antiviral medicine, such as Tamiflu, which can reduce the severity of the flu.

Those at higher risk of serious illness and complications from the flu are:

- Pregnant women, as well as women who have given birth or had a miscarriage or abortion in the past 2 weeks
- Children younger than 5 years of age, especially children younger than 2 years of age
- People 65 years and older
- People with respiratory conditions, including asthma, chronic lung disease, or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- People with other underlying health conditions, including cancer, heart disease, diabetes, blood disorders, kidney disorders, liver disorders, neurological disorders, neuromuscular disorders (including muscular dystrophy and multiple sclerosis)
- People with weakened immune systems (including those with HIV/AIDS)
- People under 19 years who are on long-term aspirin therapy

Individuals who belong to one of these higher risk groups should also contact their health care provider if they are in close contact with someone with the flu; their health care provider may prescribe antiviral medicine to help prevent the flu.

Ms Winch said the New York State Health Department is getting vaccine to health care providers in the State as quickly as the vaccine is made available by the CDC. But due to unanticipated production delays at the manufacturing level, large quantities of vaccine needed for widespread vaccination may not be available until mid-November or later.

“According to the CDC, vaccine is expected to be more widely available to persons in priority groups by mid-November and to the general public in December.”

Priority groups to receive the H1N1 vaccine, as established by the CDC, are:

- Pregnant women
- Children and young people ages 6 months through 24 years (infants under 6 months cannot be vaccinated)
- People who live with or provide care for infants under 6 months of age
- People ages 25-64 years who have medical conditions that put them at higher risk for flu-related complications
- Health care workers and emergency medical services personnel

Ms Winch said that an individual’s regular health care provider may be the best option for getting vaccinated, and residents should check with their providers to see if they are expecting to receive vaccine. Individuals whose providers indicate they will not be vaccinating should check the Columbia County Health Department’s website at www.columbiacountyny.com and watch the media for information about local vaccination clinics. Details will be provided **if** and **when** clinics are scheduled.

More information on the flu is available at on the State Health Department’s website at www.nyhealth.gov; and on the CDC website at www.flu.gov

Residents with questions may also the State Health Department Toll-free Hotline at 1-800-808-1987.