



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Additional groups of Alabamians can now receive novel H1N1 influenza vaccine

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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As Alabama continues experiencing widespread influenza, the Alabama Department of Public Health is expanding the target group of individuals eligible for novel H1N1 influenza vaccination.

Limited quantities of the novel H1N1 vaccine will be available for the following groups:

- Pregnant women
- Household and caregiver contacts of children younger than 6 months of age (parents, siblings and child care providers)
- Health care and emergency medical services personnel
- Persons from 6 months through 24 years of age
- Individuals aged 25 through 64 years with medical conditions associated with a higher risk of flu complications (such as asthma, cancer, diabetes, heart disease, HIV and certain types of arthritis)

Dr. Donald Williamson, state health officer, said, "We have been able to provide some novel H1N1 influenza vaccine to providers in both the private and public sectors, and with the ongoing delivery of vaccine we are now beginning another phase of our strategy to expand coverage to the broader target groups.

"Working with the State Department of Education, the Alabama Department of Public Health plans to begin school-based clinics the week of Nov. 30. Initial vaccination efforts will focus on children less than 10 years of age since this age group requires two doses of vaccine approximately four weeks apart for maximum protection. All school-age children should be vaccinated."

High-risk children and adults are most likely to experience severe complications if they become infected with the H1N1 influenza virus, so they must have the opportunity to be vaccinated.

Both children and adults with underlying medical conditions should receive the H1N1 influenza vaccine in injectable form rather than in aerosolized H1N1 nasal mist. These individuals should contact their health care provider about receiving the vaccine. County health departments are offering the vaccine for those who cannot receive vaccine from their health care providers.

In its first three days of administering H1N1 influenza vaccine statewide, county health departments had administered more than 70 percent of the doses they had been sent. The H1N1 influenza vaccine has been found to be safe, effective and well tolerated. The vaccine, approved and licensed by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, is manufactured using the same process as the seasonal influenza vaccine. To date, Alabama has received over 400,000 doses of the more than 590,000 doses ordered. About 60 percent of vaccine is expected to arrive after Dec. 1.

Alabama is reporting its tenth consecutive week of widespread influenza activity. Eight percent of all physician visits are for influenza-like activity up from a normal season with 2.5 percent. More than 40 percent of all schools have more than 5 percent absenteeism, and 11 percent of emergency room visits are for influenza-like illnesses. Three to 3.5 percent of hospitalizations for are influenza-like illnesses in this ongoing widespread outbreak.

More than 10 million doses of the H1N1 vaccine have been administered to date nationwide, and there have been no unexpected side effects reported. Research indicates that the vaccine is likely to be protective, and it is more dangerous to become sick with the virus than to receive the vaccine.

H1N1 influenza vaccine has been sent to physicians who serve 25- to 64-year-olds with underlying conditions that place them at risk of complications. Vaccine has also been sent to student health centers at colleges and universities, hospitals and federally qualified health centers in Alabama.

Since July there have been 30 known influenza-associated deaths in Alabama. The counties of residence and numbers of influenza-associated deaths are as follows: Baldwin, 1; Bullock, 2; Calhoun, 1; Cherokee, 1; Colbert, 1; Dale, 1; Escambia, 1; Houston/Pike, 1; Jackson, 2; Jefferson, 3; Lee, 1; Macon, 1; Madison, 1; Mobile, 2; Montgomery, 3; Morgan, 1; Russell, 1; Shelby, 2; and Talladega, 3; and Walker, 1.

The public can find H1N1 vaccination clinic dates, times and locations throughout the state at www.adph.org. Information is also available by calling the health department's toll-free flu hotline at 877-377-7285 between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. Monday through Friday, except holidays.

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