

H1N1 influenza vaccination is expanded to the general public

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Effective Dec. 22, the Alabama Department of Public Health is offering H1N1 influenza vaccine to the entire community. Previously the vaccine was restricted to those in priority groups at greatest risk of complications from the disease.

“Vaccination is the best way to protect yourself from this potentially serious disease,” Dr. Donald Williamson, state health officer, said. “Vaccine is now available in all county health departments, and all health care providers who have requested it have been sent some portion of their orders. We have removed all restrictions, and everyone is now eligible for this safe and effective vaccine.”

Alabama has recorded its 17th consecutive week of widespread influenza activity, and virtually all influenza has been confirmed as being H1N1. School absenteeism rates remain far above average. Thirty-seven documented deaths from influenza-like illnesses have occurred in Alabama since July.

In January, school-based clinics will be held for Alabama students ages 10 and older. Information packets will be sent to parents approximately one week before the vaccine is given.

Children under 10 years old need two doses of the vaccine approximately four weeks apart. During January and February those students who were given nasal mist vaccine during December will be offered the second dose. Upcoming school clinics for children under 10 will use the nasal mist vaccine, whether it is their first or second dose. Those children who are getting their first dose will need to get the second dose at their doctor's office or at the health department.

Health care providers may not charge for the vaccine itself but may charge for administering the vaccine. There is no charge for the H1N1 immunization at county health departments. Please visit www.adph.org or call your local county health department for clinic dates, times and locations. Additional information is also available on the site.