



LaPorte County Health Department

(219) 326-6808, Ext. 2200
(219) 874-5611
Fax: (219) 325-8628

Government Complex
809 State Street – Suite 401 A
LaPorte, Indiana 46350-3385

Charles Janovsky, M.D., Health Officer
Paul E. Trost, Administrator

PRESS RELEASE

Four More U.S. Pediatric Deaths Last Week from H1N1

LaPorte County, IN (January 11, 2010) - The news about H1N1 is *mostly* good, according to the LaPorte County Health Department...but the virus continues to be a serious issue.

Paul Trost, administrator of the health department, said, "The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) said that the proportion of deaths attributed to pneumonia and influenza decreased over the past week and is now back below the epidemic threshold. Visits to doctors for influenza-like illness decreased nationally this week over last week, and national hospitalizations overall for this season were unchanged from the previous week in all age groups."

Child deaths, however, continue to occur from the H1N1 influenza virus. Trost reported, "The CDC reported another four pediatric deaths this week in the U.S., and all four of these were laboratory-confirmed H1N1 cases. Since April 2009, the CDC has received reports of 293 laboratory-confirmed pediatric deaths."

Almost all influenza viruses confirmed in lab tests to date, on a nation-wide basis, continue to be H1N1 influenza viruses. The CDC and WHO (the World Health Organization) urge everyone to get an H1N1 vaccine so they are protected when the next wave of the H1N1 influenza pandemic occurs.

"Hoosiers cannot become complacent about this virus," warned Dr. Judy Monroe, Indiana State Health Commissioner. "H1N1 is not going away anytime soon. And, this virus is behaving a lot like the 1957-58 Asian flu pandemic."

"This pandemic," said Dr. Charles Janovsky, health officer for the LaPorte County Health Department, "has so far following much of the same path taken by the 1957-58 influenza pandemic, according to the CDC and WHO. That pandemic included a very serious third wave after the holidays when people spent much time together indoors and then went back to their homes, schools, churches and universities...spreading the flu wherever they went. The concern is that the H1N1 pandemic will also result in a third wave if it continues to follow the pattern of the 1957-58 pandemic. If a high percentage of U.S. residents had been vaccinated prior to the holidays, there wouldn't be as much concern about a probable third wave coming in the upcoming weeks. But, in the U. S...and specifically, in LaPorte County ...only about 15% of the population has been vaccinated, and that leaves us all very vulnerable to illness."

According to Dr. Monroe, the 1957-58 flu pandemic appeared in the United States with a series of small outbreaks over the summer of 1957. When children went back to school in the fall, they spread the disease in classrooms and brought it home to their families.

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Infection rates were highest among school children, young adults, and pregnant women in October 1957. By December 1957, the worst seemed to be over. However, during January and February 1958, there was another wave of illness among older Americans and ultimately the largest number of deaths was in this group.

Dr. Monroe said, "What we learned from the 1957-58 pandemic is influenza has the potential during a pandemic to infect one group of people first, appear to decrease, and then cause a larger number of infections in a different part of the population."

Even though the number of people getting the flu is decreasing, the H1N1 virus is still a threat. In the past, seasonal flu usually peaked in January or February and occurred as late as May.

Dr. Janovsky concluded, "There is a supply of H1N1 vaccine in LaPorte County, and we seriously urge all our residents to get vaccinated. In 1957, there was no vaccine...and not as many ways to get information out to all the public in a timely manner. Today, we DO have a vaccine...and we have email and the internet in addition to the media they had back in the 50's. There is no reason that everyone cannot be vaccinated against this virus which has taken so many lives already and has the potential to do much more damage to our communities. Please...get vaccinated."

FREE H1N1 vaccines are available at the LaPorte County Health Department every Wednesday from 9am until 7pm. These free walk-in clinics are held at the LaPorte office (809 State Street in the County Complex, 4th Floor) and at the Michigan City office (corner of 8th & Wabash Streets in the county office complex.) Vaccines are also available at Walgreen's and Kroger's pharmacies; there is a fee for the vaccine at these locations. Some physicians may also have H1N1 vaccine; there may be a fee for the vaccine at the physician offices.