

LaPorte County, IN (October 27, 2009) - The LaPorte County Health Department issued the following statements:

Definitions and Explanations

Pandemic: A pandemic is a global outbreak in an infectious, contagious disease. The declaration of a pandemic does NOT mean that there are a large number of deaths. The pandemic was declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) on July 11, 2009.

Vaccine: a biological preparation that improves immunity to a particular disease. The vaccine contains a small amount of an agent that resembles a microorganism...such as a virus. The agent stimulates the body's immune system to recognize the agent as foreign, destroy it, and "remember" it so that the immune system can more easily recognize and destroy any of these microorganisms that it later encounters.

Live Vaccine: The live version of the H1N1 vaccine comes in a nasal spray called FluMist. Live, attenuated virus micro-organisms have been cultivated under conditions that disable their ability to infect. Live, attenuated virus vaccines usually provide a more durable (long-lasting) response...providing protection for a long time. These vaccines are the preferred type of vaccine for healthy adults.

Killed (not live) Vaccine: Vaccines containing killed micro-organisms, previously infectious viruses which have been killed with chemicals or heat, include the injectible H1N1 vaccine that is recommended for anyone over the age of 6 months.

Do I need a prescription for anti-viral meds? No, you do not need a prescription. If you have a fever and other flu symptoms, contact your physician or a hospital emergency department. The anti-viral medication itself is provided at no charge by the U.S. government. Physicians, hospitals and pharmacies may charge a small "administration" fee for the anti-viral medication.

Do I need a prescription for the H1N1 vaccine? No, you do not need a prescription. The vaccine will be provided to anyone who wants one at no charge, according to the U.S. government. The vaccines are provided to health departments which distribute them to hospitals and physicians. Pregnant women, people who live with or care for children under 6 months of age, people age 6 months to 24 years of age, and people age 24-65 who have compromised immune systems or chronic health conditions are "high risk target groups" which the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends that health departments vaccinate first. Once those groups have received vaccine, anyone who has NOT yet been vaccinated will be able to get the vaccine.

H1N1 Vaccine Supplies

"We understand the concerns voiced by parents and individuals in the county," said Dr. Charles Janovsky, Health Officer of the Health Department, "and we are doing all we can to help our citizens remain healthy. The reality of the H1N1 vaccine is that the manufacturers are facing challenges in getting the virus to grow as quickly as they need it so that they can use it to make the vaccines. We expected to receive 16,000 doses the first week that shipments went out; we received only 1,600 doses. In the past few weeks, we have received only a few hundred doses instead of the 8,000 per week we expected. Most of these doses have been the live, attenuated (weakened) H1N1 FluMist vaccine in a nasal mist; this vaccine is very safe for healthy, non-pregnant people between the ages of 2 and 49.

"We have started vaccinating students in their schools because children are most susceptible to getting the virus. The few schools which have had a vaccine clinic were those where the highest percentage of absenteeism was present...and we had vaccines. Our intention was to prevent the further spread of the H1N1 in that area and, hopefully, be able to keep the school open.

"We have vaccinated health care workers who come into contact with sick people every day during the course of their work. We have received another small shipment of vaccine, and those doses will be distributed to LaPorte County pediatricians. If you have children who have not yet been vaccinated for H1N1, we urge you to contact your doctor and make an appointment to get the vaccine.

"We have picked up a small amount of vaccines from our partners," Dr. Janovsky continued, "and we are redistributing it. Most of that vaccine is being given to pediatricians as well. We do have some vaccine for pregnant women, and we have placed calls to all obstetricians in LaPorte County with a request that they send all their pregnant patients to the Health Department offices in Michigan City and LaPorte to be vaccinated.

Dr. Janovsky concluded, "The shortage in H1N1 vaccines is one generated by the manufacturers, neither by the federal or state governments nor by health departments. Apparently, the H1N1 virus takes longer to grow than anyone expected; this resulted in much shorter productions than any agency expected. We, the LaPorte County Health Department, are working closely with our partners to decide how to allocate the small amounts of vaccine that become available. Our partners include St. Anthony Memorial Health Centers, LaPorte Regional Health Services, and LaPorte County Emergency Management and LaPorte County Emergency Medical Services among others. As vaccine becomes available, we will get information to the public through the local newspapers and radio stations, local access television stations, and on the Health Department's website at www.laportecounty.org." (Click on "current flu information.")

Schools

"We are monitoring absenteeism and are in constant discussions with school superintendents regarding H1N1 in the schools," said Paul Trost, Administrator of the Health Department. "Decisions regarding school closures will be made in joint consultation with the Indiana State Health Department, the LaPorte County Health Department, and the LaPorte County school superintendents.

"The Indiana State Health Department's vaccine shipment schedule indicates that we can expect to receive about 600-1000 doses of vaccine per week. We will be able to once again set up vaccination clinics in our county schools and get our children vaccinated. School superintendents will alert parents when their school is scheduled for a clinic," Trost concluded.

Anti-Viral Medications

Last May, the federal government dispensed supplies of anti-viral medication from the Secured National Stockpile (SNS) to health departments across the country in preparation for the expected H1N1 pandemic. Most of LaPorte County's stockpile of anti-viral medication has been delivered to the two hospitals in our county for use in their emergency departments. People who come to the emergency department with FEVER and other flu symptoms will be given the anti-viral medication. There will be no charge for the medication itself because it was provided free by the U.S. government. There may, however, be a small "administration" fee charged.

Questions about the H1N1 vaccine should be directed to the LaPorte County Health Department at 219/326-6808 X2200 or by email to H1N1@laportecounty.org. Visit the website at www.laportecounty.org and click on "current local flu information" just beneath the waving flag.

Questions about the content of this press release should be directed to the LaPorte County Health Department using above contact information.. Technical questions about the press release (PDF) received via email should be directed to JK Enterprises at jkostielney@csinet.net.