

H1N1 Update

December 22, 2009

The State Department of Health and Senior Services announced on Wednesday, December 16, 2009 that physicians, local and county health departments and other health care providers can now provide the H1N1 vaccine to the general public. Until now, the Department's H1N1 vaccination program has been limited to individuals in specific target groups who were most at risk of serious complications from the flu. While it is still important for those in target groups to get vaccinated as soon as possible, it is important for all residents of the state – older than six months of age – to be vaccinated against H1N1. Vaccination remains our most effective tool to prevent the flu.

The decision to expand the vaccination to the general public was based on several factors. The level of H1N1 vaccine has significantly increased in the state – to over 2.25 million doses – and local and county health officials have indicated that H1N1 vaccine demand among individuals in the target groups has decreased. In addition, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recently recommended that states consider increasing vaccine access to the general public and more than half the states – including our neighbors – have expanded their vaccination programs to the general public.

Individuals should speak with their healthcare provider about availability of the vaccine and the general public health precautions to remain healthy. There are also many common sense approaches that everyone can take to prepare for this flu season to protect themselves and their families: wash your hands frequently, cover your cough and sneezes, and stay home from work or school if you are sick.

Several tools are available for New Jerseyans seeking an H1N1 flu shot:

- The DHSS website (<http://www.nj.gov/health>) has two flu shot locators to help individuals find public health clinics that are being planned and will be announced when the vaccine is available, as well as to find clinics with scheduled dates.
- Call New Jersey's H1N1 Information Hotline – 1-866-321-9571.
- Contact your physician, community health center, local pharmacy, local or county health department, hospital or school. Many doctors, health clinics and schools are providing the vaccine to their patients and students, while local health departments, pharmacies and some hospitals are offering clinics to the public.

In addition, the Centers for Disease Control has an excellent webpage devoted to flu in the workplace at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/workplace>