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When can everyone get the H1N1 Vaccine?

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For Immediate Release

ATLANTIC – Cass County Public Health continues to receive limited amounts of 2009 H1N1 influenza vaccine. Because there is currently not enough vaccine available for widespread use, the vaccine remains targeted to those at highest risk of becoming ill and developing complications. These priority groups include:

- Pregnant women
- People who live with or care for children younger than 6 months of age
- Health care and emergency medical services personnel
- Persons between 6 months and 24 years of age
- Persons ages 25 years through 64 years who are at higher risk for novel H1N1 influenza because of chronic health disorders or compromised immune systems.

“These H1N1 priority groups are different than those for seasonal influenza vaccine,” said Denise Coder, Cass County Memorial Hospital Community Health Coordinator. “In both cases, priority groups are determined by the national Advisory Committee for Immunization Practices (a group of health care providers, academics, and other experts in vaccinations) and are then published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). These recommendations for vaccine use are based on knowledge of which populations are being most severely affected by the virus, and which populations are most likely to spread the virus.” For instance, young children are in the priority group for both the seasonal and H1N1 vaccines, but most elderly lowans, while targeted for the seasonal influenza vaccine, are low on the list for the H1N1 vaccine.

Why the difference in priority groups? The CDC actively tracks both seasonal and H1N1 influenza in the United States and around the world. There has been very little 2009 H1N1 illness in people 65 and older since it emerged. This has been true both in the United States and in other parts of the world. Surveillance of who is most likely to be infected with 2009 H1N1 demonstrates that people 65 and older are the **least likely** to get sick with this virus, while younger people are much more likely to become ill.

Why people 65 and older are the least likely to be infected with 2009 H1N1 flu is not completely understood, but may be due to underlying immunity developed after

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exposure to a similar flu virus they had as children. However, if those over 65 become ill, they are likely to develop serious complications from their illness. Thus, people 65 years and older are prioritized for treatment with antiviral drugs if they do become sick with H1N1.

As the H1N1 vaccine becomes widely available, the groups being offered the vaccines will continue to be expanded. Eventually, it may be offered to anyone who wants to be vaccinated. Until that time, it remains important to take personal actions to prevent the spread of the virus by covering your cough, cleaning your hands, and containing germs by staying home when ill.

For current information regarding local H1N1 and Seasonal Influenza vaccination clinics, call the Cass County Health System Health Hotline at 712-243-7800, or check the CCHS website, www.casshealth.org. A statewide toll-free hotline has been established for public questions about seasonal and H1N1 influenza at 1-800-447-1985. More information can also be found at www.idph.state.ia.us.

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