



Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services



HEALTH ALERT NETWORK

Update

TO: Nebraska Healthcare Providers, Hospitals, and Laboratories
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RE: Influenza Update: Epidemiology & Vaccine Guidance

Nebraska public health officials continue to monitor state and national influenza activity. In the past three weeks, five Nebraska residents had laboratory-confirmed pandemic H1N1 influenza. All of these persons appear to have acquired their illness within the state. Two were hospitalized but were not critically ill. No clusters or outbreaks have been identified in Nebraska. States in the southeast have experienced a recent increase in H1N1 activity. Georgia, Alabama and South Carolina are currently reporting regional flu activity, while six other Southeastern states -- Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia -- plus Hawaii, New Mexico, and Puerto Rico are reporting localized pockets of flu activity. The flu activity in all of these states is caused by the 2009 H1N1 pandemic flu strain and is mainly affecting adults with underlying conditions. The virus itself has not changed or mutated.

Vaccination rates for the pandemic H1N1 influenza virus have varied widely around the country, from a high of 39% in Rhode Island to a low of 13% in Mississippi. Nebraska's estimated percent of population vaccinated is 29%.

Because of the difficulty in predicting how influenza might spread, we continue to ask the Nebraska medical community to maintain vigilance for influenza. We continue to encourage rapid diagnostic testing in persons with suspected influenza, and request that providers collect a nasopharyngeal swab for PCR at the Nebraska Public Health Laboratory in persons with a positive rapid flu test or in any patient strongly suspected of influenza.

Providers should continue to promote H1N1 influenza vaccination, particularly in high risk groups. CDC recommends that "Anyone who wants to protect themselves against 2009 H1N1 should get vaccinated, however vaccination is especially important for people at higher risk of serious complications from 2009 H1N1, including people with certain health conditions, the very young, and those people 65 years and older. The majority of 2009 H1N1 deaths have occurred in people between the ages of 50 and 64 years of age; 80 percent of whom have had an underlying health condition. Health conditions that increase the risk of being hospitalized from 2009 H1N1 include lung disease like asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), diabetes, heart, or neurologic disease, and pregnancy."

H1N1 vaccine supplies remain available throughout Nebraska. Providers seeking additional influenza vaccine should contact their local health department. Nebraska hospitals should consider influenza vaccination in high risk patients about to be discharged.

We will continue to inform the Nebraska medical community of changes in the epidemiology of influenza and further modifications of prevention recommendations.