

District Health Department #10
Serving the counties of: Crawford, Kalkaska, Lake, Manistee, Mason,
Mecosta, Missaukee, Newaygo, Oceana, and Wexford Counties



9-8-09

Dear First Responders (EMS, Fire Service, Law Enforcement, other Emergency Personnel),

The flu virus of current concern this fall and winter is the new 2009 novel H1N1 influenza virus, referred to early on as the swine flu. This new virus is actually a combination of genetic material from bird, human and swine viruses. As students return to school, we expect the spread of the virus to dramatically escalate. This novel H1N1 virus is a different virus than the seasonal flu viruses that circulate in slightly different forms each year.

The seasonal flu vaccination, offered each year and available now, will not protect you against the novel H1N1 flu, and the novel H1N1 flu vaccine will not protect you against the seasonal flu. The novel H1N1 flu vaccine is not yet available; it is currently in production and is expected to be released later this fall. The seasonal flu shot is here now and is recommended for all Americans.

This year the seasonal flu shot has three components, made up of strains from two influenza A viruses and one influenza B virus. The novel H1N1 flu shot will have one killed viral component against only the novel virus and will start arriving in mid to late October. First Responders are recommended to be one of the first groups to receive the vaccine, both to protect you and to prevent you spreading it to your patients.

Flu vaccines are safe. The new H1N1 vaccine is being produced in exactly the same manner as seasonal flu vaccine and will have the same safety profile. Seasonal flu vaccine has had a great safety record for 20 years and is a killed virus, so you cannot get the flu from the shot.

Few people in the U.S. have immunity against novel H1N1. There are three reasons for you to get both the seasonal vaccine and the H1N1 vaccine:

1. The seasonal vaccine will prevent you from getting sick with seasonal flu and spreading it to your family and patients.
2. The swine flu vaccine will prevent you from getting sick with the new H1N1 virus for which you have no immunity and will keep you from spreading it to your family and patients.
3. Getting both vaccines will help prevent the seasonal and H1N1 viruses from joining together in your body to form a new and potentially more deadly virus.

Thus it is recommended and safe for you to plan on getting both influenza vaccinations this year as part of your duties and responsibilities as a community first responder who interacts with many patients, some of whom are debilitated and at-risk for serious complications if they get sick with the flu. Your organizations are working with us to identify those of you who are at highest risk according to direct patient contact, and will notify you when the vaccinations will be scheduled.

Thank you for your work and dedication in service to our communities.

Sincerely,

Dr James Wilson
Medical Director