



H1N1 in Oregon

Dr. Mel Kohn

October 27, 2009

flu.oregon.gov

H1N1 flu in Oregon - Update

Mel Kohn MD, MPH, director of Oregon Public Health Division

To help make sure that everyone in our state has the best and most current information about H1N1 flu in Oregon, the Oregon Public Health Division is launching this newsletter that will come out on a regular basis. You are receiving it because you attended the Flu Summit, you signed up on the DHS Web site to receive information about H1N1, or you are an employee of the Oregon Department of Human Resources.

Please forward this email to anyone you think would like to receive it. To subscribe, visit: www.oregon.gov/DHS/govdelivery.shtml, select *Subscribe*, then *H1N1 Influenza Information*.

Web site and statewide influenza hotline

Oregon Public Health's Web site, www.flu.oregon.gov, and the statewide influenza hotline at 1-800-978-3040, have the most recent information about H1N1 in Oregon and vaccine clinics across the state.

The influenza situation in Oregon and throughout the country

The pandemic H1N1 strain continues to spread in Oregon. Between September 1, 2009, and October 26, 2009, there have been 482 hospitalizations and 15 deaths in Oregon linked to influenza. Hospital capacity across the state is adequate to handle the increase, although some hospitals have expressed concern that they may be at full capacity

soon.

We are also experiencing outbreaks of flu in schools across the state, in some cases with 30 percent or more of staff or students out ill. So while H1N1 influenza is not more severe than the seasonal flu, more of us are getting sick because none of us have immunity to this new strain of influenza.

H1N1 vaccine update

As you have likely heard, supplies of H1N1 vaccine are arriving more slowly across the country than originally anticipated. Currently Oregon has only about 6 percent of the supply necessary to vaccinate the priority groups. While more is coming every day, demand for H1N1 vaccine is currently outpacing supply. That means that some vaccine clinics have been delayed or cancelled, which has left people wondering what will happen in their communities if the vaccine doesn't arrive in time to slow the spread of H1N1.

The vaccine is being distributed as soon as it hits the state and divided up equally among the counties. A few vaccine clinics are scheduled around the state; flu.oregon.gov has the most recent statewide information. As supply increases, there will be more clinics scheduled. Pregnant women, children, health care providers and public safety workers, people caring for infants under 6 months, and people with underlying health conditions remain the top priorities for the vaccine.

I have heard people express concern that because of the slow pace of vaccine arrival it may be too late to do much good. That is not accurate. It is likely that there will be a second wave of illness from pandemic H1N1 in the spring, so vaccinating as many people in the priority groups is still likely to be very beneficial, even if that takes until early in 2010.

We are working hard, even without much vaccine, to help Oregon get through the coming weeks.

Oregon Public Health has a central operations center that is staffed full-

time to help coordinate the state's response and ensure that the most up-to-date information is available for decision-makers and the public.

Supporting our healthcare system is an important focus of our work. We are carefully monitoring hospital capacity and medical supplies, and filling requests for resources such as antivirals, masks, gloves and ventilators. Although the healthcare system is stressed, so far hospital and intensive care unit capacity and supplies across the state are adequate. Additionally we have been providing assistance and guidance to hospitals and healthcare providers in managing a surge of patients due to the pandemic.

On Friday October 23, President Obama issued a declaration that will allow the secretary of Health and Human Services to grant hospitals temporary waivers of certain federal regulations on a case-by-case basis. This will help hospitals establish alternate care sites, modify patient triage protocols, as well as patient transfer procedures and other actions that occur when they fully implement disaster operations plans.

We are also planning to expand our hotline in the next few weeks to include a nurse advice line for people experiencing flu symptoms, which will help reduce the demands on our healthcare system across the state.

Another important focus of our work relates to providing accurate information to the public using our Web site. This week we plan to unveil a major Web site redesign that will make it even more useful.

We work closely with local health departments who are on the frontlines of our response in all of these activities.

Declarations of emergency

Last Friday, Josephine County declared a county-level emergency because of H1N1 pandemic stress on the healthcare system there. This will help the county better marshal its resources for addressing the pandemic. We do expect that other counties may make similar emergency declarations in the near future as the situation in individual

counties warrants.

At this point, the situation in Oregon has not merited a statewide declaration of emergency because we are able to deploy supplies and resources to local communities. However, it is reassuring to know that if the need arises for a declaration, Governor Kulongoski is prepared to act.

There are important actions for individuals to take now until the vaccine arrives

While it is disappointing that the vaccine hasn't arrived yet for everyone who needs it, there are things we can do to protect ourselves, our families and our communities by slowing the spread of H1N1 influenza. Also, it's important to remember that for most people, this flu is not more dangerous than the regular seasonal flu. Most people who contract H1N1 will have flu symptoms for 7-10 days, then get better. For the overwhelming majority, the best treatment is to stay home, get plenty of rest and fluids, and treat the fever with acetaminophen or ibuprofen. In a few rare cases, medical care will be required. [Click here](#) for information about whether symptoms call for medical care.

Also, be proactive. If you have the flu, don't spread it. Stay home for 24 hours after your fever subsides. If you are a business owner, have a plan that allows your employees to stay home. Also, protect yourself from getting the flu--take germ-killing actions such as frequent hand washing and sanitizing surfaces.

Again, www.flu.oregon.gov and our statewide hotline at 1-800-978-3040 are the best places to get the latest information on flu in Oregon.

I hope that you have found this newsletter interesting and useful. It is the first of regular updates Oregon Public Health will be sending out to make sure you have the most current information possible as we get through this flu season together.