

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Visiting Nursing Association – Bremer County Public Health

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When Can Everyone Get the H1N1 Vaccine?

Visiting Nursing Association – Bremer County 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 groups include pregnant women, parents, siblings, or care providers for infants under 6 months of age, health care and emergency medical services personnel, children aged 6 months – 24 years and adults aged 25 -64 years with chronic medical conditions. Chronic medical conditions may include lung disease (asthma, COPD, emphysema), heart disease (except hypertension), kidney or liver disease, diabetes, neurologic or blood or immune illness.

“These H1N1 priority target groups are different from the target groups for seasonal influenza vaccine,” said Debbie Crawford RN, MSN executive director. “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 Iowans, 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 the 2009 H1N1 virus 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 and become seriously ill, 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 exposure to a similar flu virus that 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 this season if they do become sick.

Eventually, 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 in Bremer County. 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.

Questions call Visiting Nursing Association – Bremer County Public Health at 319-235-6201. Information may also be found at www.vnawaterloo.org/bcph.html. 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.