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News Release

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H1N1 Vaccine Availability

BREMERTON, WA — The Health District is receiving a large number of inquiries from the general public regarding the availability of the H1N1 influenza vaccine. The District is issuing this release in response to commonly asked questions regarding H1N1 vaccine availability, and to emphasize key messages related to the vaccine.

The public is advised that H1N1 flu is currently *widespread* in schools, workplaces, and the community as a whole. The District is urging the general public to be patient and to stay informed as we work through the vaccination process.

1. When can I get the H1N1 vaccine?

At this time, the H1N1 vaccine is still being manufactured and is not yet widely available for the general public. Nationally and locally, the vaccine is arriving slower than earlier estimates. Based on current information, additional supplies of vaccine needed for the general public will arrive in Kitsap County in the coming weeks. Exact amounts of the vaccine and delivery dates are difficult to predict due to vaccine production delays cited by the manufacturers. Delays are related to production issues, not safety. The vaccine is tested the same way as seasonal flu vaccine and both vaccines are made the same way.

The Health District is working with the Washington State Department of Health and CDC to assure all shipments go out to Kitsap County immunization providers continuously as soon as possible. Shipments of the vaccine are received weekly and many doses are direct shipped to larger medical providers. Vaccine is not being stockpiled, but rather is being pushed out as fast as possible.

We hope eventually to have enough vaccine for everyone and we are also making plans to ensure that people without personal medical providers will have access to the vaccine.

2. Who has priority to receive the vaccine right now?

The first doses of the H1N1 vaccine began arriving in Kitsap County during the week of October 12th. Because of the small amount of vaccine received to date, vaccine is being prioritized to protect people most at risk for H1N1 influenza, as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and as modified by the Health District due to vaccine delivery delays. Vaccine availability will be opened up to everyone who wants it as soon as supplies are sufficient to cover demand in risk groups. The priority groups include:

- Pregnant women
- People who live with or care for children younger than 6 months of age
- Children age 6 months through 4 years old
- Children and adults up to age 64 years with serious, chronic medical conditions (especially lung disease)
- Healthcare and emergency workers

3. If I get H1N1, can I be treated to lessen the symptoms?

Antiviral medications to treat H1N1 flu are currently available in Kitsap County, but require a doctor's prescription. Most people do not need these antiviral drugs to fully recover from the flu, however, persons at higher risk for severe flu complications, or those with severe flu illness who require hospitalization, might benefit from antiviral medications. Antiviral medications are available for persons one year of age and older. Ask your health care provider whether you need antiviral medication. Antiviral medication is most effective if started within 48 hours of the first symptoms of illness.

4. If I'm not yet vaccinated, what should I do to protect myself from H1N1 flu?

In addition to getting vaccinated, take these everyday steps to prevent getting the flu:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way. That's why there's such an emphasis on hand washing.

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it. Don't cough into your bare hand.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- Stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities. Your fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine. Keep away from others as much as possible to keep *them* from getting sick.

For additional information on H1N1 vaccine availability:

- Call your medical provider or local pharmacy.
- Call the Health District Flu Line at (360) 337-5240.
- Go to the Health District's Flu Information Website:
www.kitsapcountyhealth.com/h1n1/h1n1.htm

For additional information about the H1N1 vaccine, please contact the Health District's Clinical Services Program at (360) 337-5235.

The media contact for this release is Scott Daniels, Public Information Officer, at (360) 337-5287 (office), or (360) 271-9230 (cell).

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