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Community immunity: Vaccinate now to fend off H1N1 “third wave” later
National Influenza Immunization Week, Jan. 10-16

SNOHOMISH COUNTY, Wash. – H1N1 (swine) influenza first blossomed in Snohomish County in Spring 2009 before vaccine to fight it was available. This past autumn a second wave of H1N1 illness fell upon the region. Initially, slow vaccine production led to delayed and low local supply of vaccine, requiring local public health to vaccinate only the most vulnerable people. When supply caught up to demand in December, eligibility requirements were lifted -- and now there is plenty of vaccine on hand to immunize everyone who wants it.

“A ‘third wave’ of H1N1 illness is a real concern – unless half the population has immunity to the virus,” said Dr. Gary Goldbaum, Health Officer and Director of Snohomish Health District. “People develop immunity through vaccination or through illness. We estimate that between 30 and 40 percent of our community has some immunity to H1N1, but we need to boost that to 50 percent to stop the virus in its tracks, preventing a third round of illness in Snohomish County.”

Influenza is unpredictable, but is expected to continue circulating for months, caused by either 2009 H1N1 viruses or regular seasonal influenza viruses. In the Pacific Northwest, flu season usually peaks in March.

As of mid-December, Snohomish County medical providers and pharmacies have received about 200,000 doses of H1N1 vaccine since mid-September. Retail chain store pharmacies now stock it as well, making vaccine readily available throughout the county. Additionally, Snohomish Health District administers H1N1 vaccine at no cost through its two clinics by appointment. Call 425.339.5220 for an appointment in Everett (3020 Rucker Ave, Suite 108), and 425.775.3522 in Lynnwood (6101 – 200th St SW, Suite 100).

As of mid-November, an estimated 47 million Americans have had 2009 H1N1 influenza, with approximately 213,000 hospitalizations and 9,820 deaths. From September 13, 2009, to date, slightly more than 100 Snohomish County residents have been hospitalized for influenza-like illness, and six have died.

The 2009 H1N1 vaccine is the best way to protect against 2009 H1N1 influenza. Those who have yet to be vaccinated are encouraged to get vaccinated now. This includes people with chronic medical conditions, pregnant women, and others in the initial target groups, as well as people who were asked to wait to be vaccinated when 2009 H1N1 vaccine supplies were limited.

Among those who have been waiting to get vaccine are people 65 years and older as well as people 25-64 who do not have a chronic medical condition. These groups are encouraged to get vaccinated. While older people have been less likely to be infected with the 2009 H1N1 virus compared to younger people, there have been severe infections and deaths from 2009 H1N1 in every age group, including people 65 and older.
Vaccination with 2009 H1N1 vaccine continues to be particularly important for people in the initial target groups, including pregnant women; household contacts and caregivers of infants younger than six months of age; health care and emergency medical services personnel; all individuals six months through 24 years of age; and individuals 25 through 64 years of age who have medical conditions associated with higher risk of complications from influenza. It is important for unvaccinated people in these groups to take advantage of the ample vaccine supply and get vaccinated now.

Incorporated in 1959, the Snohomish Health District works for a safer and healthier community through disease prevention, health promotion, and protection from environmental threats. Find more information about the Health District at [www.snohd.org](http://www.snohd.org), and about H1N1 at [www.snocoflu.com](http://www.snocoflu.com).