

Current Influenza Vaccine Supply Situation Recorded Information Line – 10/28/04

Although the Broome County Health Department and Office for Aging Flu Clinics have been postponed indefinitely due to the influenza vaccine shortage, there is flu vaccine in our community. The Broome County Health Department is beginning to distribute its supply of vaccine to facilities that were affected by the shortage. This vaccine will be distributed among long-term care facilities and hospital-affiliated and unaffiliated Primary Care Providers.

According to information provided by the New York State Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control, our community will be receiving additional vaccine supplies periodically over the next four to six weeks. This vaccine will only be provided to those residents in the priority groups and generally through primary care providers.

Some primary care physicians have begun to provide their limited flu vaccine supplies to their patients that are high risk according to the Centers for Disease Control recommendations. If you are in one of these priority groups, contact your primary care provider. Be patient because the office may not have vaccine now but may get it later. Call again in a week or so, be persistent but polite. Remember it is not the health department or your primary care provider's fault the vaccine supply is limited. In most cases, specialty doctors, such as neurologists, cardiologist or endocrinologists, in our community do not have flu vaccine. Residents need to check with their family doctor for flu vaccine appointments. That is the medical provider who made the referral to the specialty doctor.

The Influenza season can peak anywhere from December through March, but most often peaks in February. So getting the vaccine in December, or even January, can be beneficial during most flu seasons. There is little, if any, laboratory confirmed influenza illness in Broome County at this time. The influenza activity in New York State is considered sporadic which indicates isolated cases and no increases in influenza-like illness or outbreaks. It is important for the public to realize that there has not been a change in the influenza activity at this point, only in the availability of the vaccine. There is no need for the public to panic.

The following priority groups for vaccination with inactivated influenza vaccine this season are considered to be of equal importance and are:

- **Adults aged 65 years or older** - even if you are in great health;
- **All children aged 6 – 23 months** - Children younger than 2 years old have one of the highest rates of hospitalization from influenza;
- **Adults and children 2 years of age and older with chronic health conditions** – Like heart disease, diabetes, kidney disease, asthma, cancer, or HIV/AIDS;
- **Women who will be pregnant during the influenza season** – Flu season is typically November through March;
- **Residents of nursing homes and long-term care facilities;**
- **Children aged 6 months – 18 years who take aspirin daily;**
- **Health-care workers who provide direct, hands-on care to patients;** and
- **Out-of-home caregivers and household contacts of children aged less than 6 months** (children under the age of 6 months cannot be vaccinated).

All primary care providers will be using these categories as screening guidance for those who will be able to get the vaccine.

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If you are not included in one of these priority groups, please don't ask for a flu shot. Be a "Health Hero"! Save flu vaccine for the people who need it most. For most healthy adults, coming down with the flu is an annoyance, but not a serious health threat.

There are certain good health habits that can help prevent the spread of flu:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick too.
- Stay home when you are sick. If possible, stay home from work, school, and errands when you are sick. You will help prevent others from catching your illness.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. It may prevent those around you from getting sick. If you don't have a tissue, cough into your sleeve.
- Clean your hands after you cough or sneeze – with soap and warm water, or an alcohol-based hand cleaner. Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Clean frequently touched surfaces, such as doorknobs, water faucets, refrigerator handles and telephones.

Other good habits, such as getting plenty of sleep, engaging in physical activity, managing stress, drinking water, and eating good food, will boost your immune system and help you stay healthy.

Please continue to follow the news for additional information concerning the situation. Broome County residents can also go to the Broome County website at www.gobroomecounty.com and click on the Flu Icon for additional information. The recorded Information Line will be updated with new information as we have it. That number is 607.778.3911, Option 1.