

Current Influenza Vaccine Supply Situation Recorded Information Line – 11/04/04

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 has finished distributing its supply of over 4,000 doses of vaccine to facilities that were affected by the shortage. This vaccine was distributed among long-term care facilities and hospital-affiliated and unaffiliated Primary Care doctors.

This week the New York State Department of Health is shipping additional influenza vaccine to Broome County. Some of the vaccine will go directly to doctors that treat children. The vaccine supply that the health department will receive from the New York State Department of Health will be given to primary care or family doctors in our community that did not get the vaccine they had originally ordered. This vaccine can then be given to those residents in the priority groups, by their family doctors.

If you are in one of these priority groups and have not yet gotten a flu vaccination, contact your family doctor. Be patient because the office may not have vaccine right now but may get it later. Call again in a week or so, be persistent but polite. Remember it is not the fault of the health department or your primary care doctor that the vaccine supply is limited. In most cases, specialty doctors, such as neurologists, or cardiologist, do not have flu vaccine. You should check with your family doctor for flu vaccine appointments. That is the medical doctor who referred you 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. At this time, there are a limited number of laboratory confirmed influenza cases in Broome County. The influenza activity in New York State is now categorized as regional, which indicates increased influenza-like illness in some parts of the state. The good news is that there is vaccine in our community so there is no need for the public to panic.

The following priority groups for vaccination 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 doctors will be using these categories as screening guidance for those who will be able to get the vaccine.

If you are not included in one of these priority groups, please step aside and let others have a shot. Flu is unpleasant but usually not life threatening for most people.

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.