

H1N1 is Still With Us

Dr. Jody Hershey, Director of the New River Health District, warns that, “H1N1 is still very much with us.” Last week, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced that this is a critical time in our Nation’s response as H1N1 influenza continues to circulate.

“There are still vulnerable children and adults who lack the protection of vaccination,” according to Dr. Hershey.

Areas in the southeastern U.S. are continuing to report regional or local flu activity, including on college campuses. Here in the New River Valley, flu activity has increased from sporadic to local as the number of reports of influenza-like-illness have been increasing over the past few weeks.

H1N1 vaccine is widely available at doctor’s offices, health departments, and pharmacies in the New River Valley. Even if you put off being vaccinated until now, vaccination with the H1N1 influenza vaccine is still beneficial. CDC strongly urges people with underlying health conditions and those over age 65 to get vaccinated. Other vulnerable groups that need to be vaccinated include: infants who were too young to vaccinate when the vaccine was first available and who now are at least 6 months of age, newly pregnant women, children 9 and under who have only received one dose of vaccine, racial/ethnic minorities and hard-to-reach populations.

Vaccine supplies are plentiful and the circulating virus still closely matches the one in the pandemic vaccine. There is excellent safety data on the H1N1 vaccine. “The future is hard to predict; however, we do know that the virus is still around, and the vaccine is very safe,” says Dr. Hershey. Dr. Hershey adds that, “Vaccination is the best way to protect yourself or your loved ones from flu. Continued vaccination efforts may help decrease our communities’ susceptibility to a possibly developing third wave of this pandemic.”

The H1N1 vaccine is always available free at local health departments during normal business hours to all walk-in clients as well as those receiving any health department services Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Local health departments may be contacted as follows:

- Floyd County – 203-205 South Locust Street, Floyd, (540) 745-2141
- Giles County – 120 North Main Street, Pearisburg, (540) 921-2891
- Montgomery County – 210 South Pepper Street, Suite A, Christiansburg, (540) 381-7100
- Pulaski County – 170 Fourth Street, NW, Pulaski, (540) 994-5030 (This health department is temporarily closed due to renovation; please call Radford City Health Department at (540) 831-5774 for assistance.)
- Radford City – 212 Third Avenue, Radford, (540) 831-5774

Up-to-date H1N1 information is available online at the CDC website (<http://cdc.gov/h1n1flu/>) and the Virginia Department of Health website (www.vdh.virginia.gov).

Dr. Hershey emphasizes, “If you have not had the H1N1 vaccine this season, it’s not too late. So please don’t put it off any longer. Remember, it’s up to you to fight the flu!