INYO COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH BRIEF

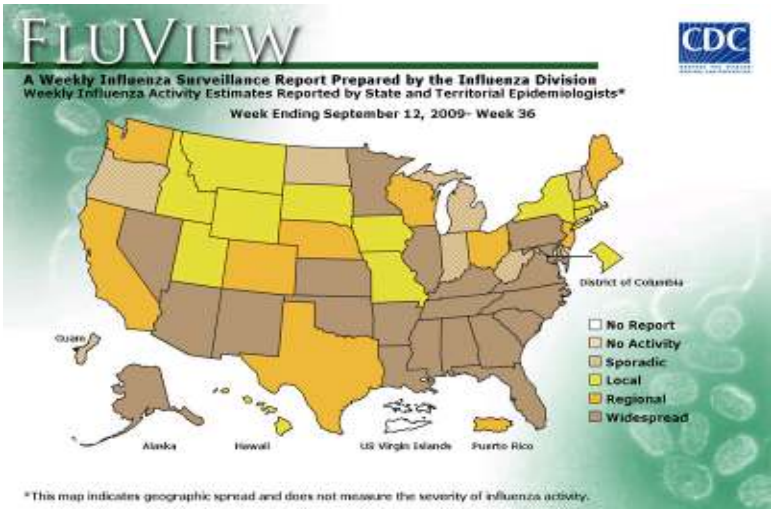
A Division of Health & Human Services
Richard O. Johnson, M.D., MPH
Public Health Officer, Inyo County
760-914-0496
drrickjohn@gmail.com

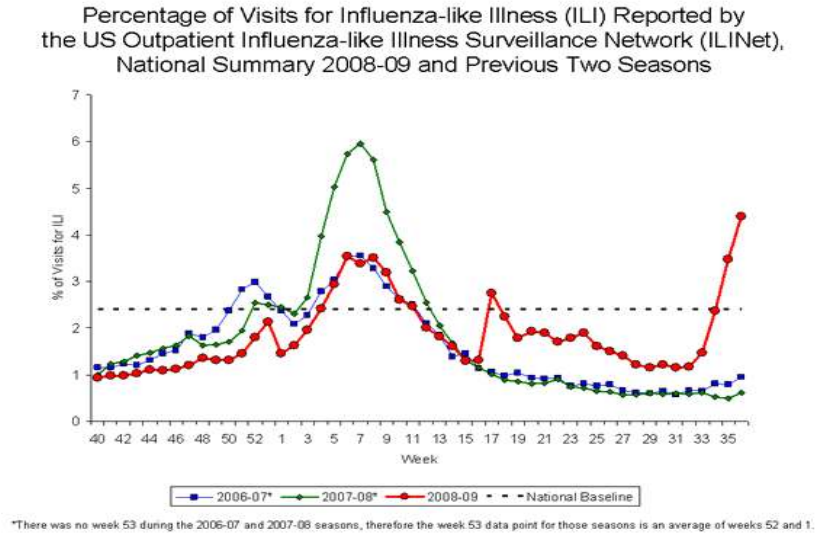
Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Flu Update – Sep 21, 2009 – Closer, but Not Here Yet!

A review of the key indictors found that influenza activity continued to increase in the United States compared to prior weeks. There is no evidence of an increase locally. Below is a summary of the most recent key indicators from across the country:

- Visits to doctors for influenza-like illness (ILI) nationally are dramatically increasing. Visits to doctors for influenza-like illness are higher than what is expected during this time of year and have increased for five consecutive weeks now. This is very unusual for this time of year.
- Total influenza hospitalization rates for adults and children are similar to or lower than seasonal influenza hospitalization rates depending on age group, but are higher than expected for this time of year. Hospitalizations and deaths typically increase 2 weeks after an increase in visits to doctors.
- The proportion of deaths attributed to pneumonia and influenza (P&I) was low and within the bounds of what is expected at this time of year. Deaths typically increase at the same time as hospitalizations.
- Twenty-one states are reporting widespread influenza activity at this time, including our neighboring states of Nevada and Arizona. This is up from 11 states last week, and 5 states the week before. Any reports of widespread influenza activity in September are very unusual.
- Almost all of the influenza viruses identified so far are 2009 H1N1 influenza A viruses. These viruses remain similar to the viruses chosen for the 2009 H1N1 vaccine, and remain susceptible to the antiviral drugs oseltamivir (Tamiflu) and zanamivir (Relenza) with rare exceptions.
- In summary, this H1N1 virus is demonstrating a very efficient pattern of rapid spread, but has not become a big killer. However, as the cases of illness increase, deaths will increase also.





Seasonal Influenza Vaccine is currently available. Vaccination should start now! Seasonal influenza vaccine will not prevent H1N1 infection, but will help protect against circulating seasonal strains expected this fall. Check with your healthcare provider, pharmacy, or the Health Department. The Health Department has clinics scheduled throughout Inyo County. Call 760-873-7868 for more information.

Pandemic influenza H1N1 vaccine update

- **FDA approves four H1N1 vaccines**: Current approvals recommend a single dose for healthy older children and adults and two doses for children younger than age 8 or 9 years, depending on the manufacturer; dosing recommendations may change based on results of pending clinical trials. The four approved pH1N1 vaccines do not use adjuvants and are being manufactured using the same processes as seasonal influenza vaccines.

- CDC releases Q&A's regarding **vaccine safety**. Documents include Q&A's on 2009 H1N1 influenza A vaccine safety, thimerosal, and Guillain-Barre syndrome. 2009 H1N1 influenza vaccine is expected to have a similar safety profile to seasonal influenza vaccine. See http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/vaccination/

- **H1N1 flu vaccinations could begin earlier than expected:** A week after researchers determined that one shot was sufficient for protection against the H1N1 flu, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) unexpectedly announced on Sunday (September 13) that the first round of H1N1 flu vaccines could be available as early as the first week of October, which is sooner than projected. The next day (Tuesday September 15), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the new H1N1 flu vaccine, giving the green light to pharmaceutical companies to begin mass vaccinations next month. The vaccine appears to provide protection from the virus within eight to 10 days of administration. Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius announced that the vaccines will be available at up to 90,000 sites, including schools and clinics, across the US. Sebelius said the vaccine will be distributed right away to appointed locations and that eventually they "will have enough vaccine available for everyone." The government has already ordered 195 million doses of vaccine, but may order more if the demand is high enough.

On Friday (September 18), the CDC said that the first doses of swine flu vaccine may all be the nasal spray version. The federal government has said that a trickle of vaccine would be available by early October, but on Friday defined that as being an estimated 3.4 million doses. It looks like all the doses would be the nasal spray vaccine that is approved for only healthy people ages 2 to 49. Since the spray is not recommended for some of the people most in danger of swine flu, which includes pregnant women, children younger than 2 and those with asthma and other chronic respiratory diseases, they will remain uncovered for a period of time. It is possible that some shots would be available by the first week of October.

Worldwide spread: The World Health Organization's (WHO) latest update on Friday (September 18) registered 3,486 deaths among 296,471 laboratory-confirmed cases of H1N1 flu worldwide. The Americas region still has the highest death toll at 2,625, while the Asia-Pacific region had 620 deaths, Europe reported 140 deaths, while in the Middle East 61 people died from the virus and in Africa, 40 deaths have been reported. Brazil continues to report the highest death toll in the world with 899 among 9,249 cases, Brazil's Health Ministry reported on Wednesday (September 16). Despite Brazil holding the highest death toll, the number of critical cases recorded decreased for its fifth consecutive week. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) most recent update reports 364 deaths with 4,569 hospitalizations.

Age groups most at risk: Statistics reveal that about 40 percent of people who have succumbed to the H1N1 flu or have become seriously ill due to the disease were young and otherwise healthy individuals. Over 50 percent of those who became very sick from the new virus were under the age of 20, while the death rate was highest among people between the ages of 25 and 49. With seasonal flu, most deaths are in those over the age of 65 – with the H1N1 virus, only 12% of deaths are in those over 65 years of age.

Experts say H1N1 flu may spread week or more after symptoms appear: Since the H1N1 flu outbreak emerged in April, the CDC has been telling people to stay home from work and school and to avoid any contact with others until a day after fever stops. On Tuesday (September 15), new research conducted at the Institute of Public Health in Quebec suggested that the new virus could be transmitted to others for a week or more after symptoms first appear. Doctors reportedly said that coughing could be a better sign than a fever for determining who is contagious. This study shows you're not contagious for a day or two. You're probably contagious for about a week. Although the new studies suggest a longer contagious period for the H1N1 flu, the duration is still unclear. It has also not been determined whether the new findings will lead the CDC to rethink its guidance on how long infected people should stay inside. Long breaks from work and school do not seem worth it as the virus mostly causes mild illness and is so widespread.

For more information on the novel 2009 H1N1 influenza, go to:
Public Health – Inyo County: http://www.inyocounty.us/publichealth/index.php
U.S. Government: www.flu.gov
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/
California Department of Public Health:
http://www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/discond/Pages/SwineInfluenza.aspx