
2009-2010 Influenza Season Update #16
Adults Age 65+ and 2009 H1N1 Vaccine

To: Health Care Providers
From: Wendy Davis, MD, Commissioner of Health

– Please Distribute Widely –

The Vermont Department of Health is aware that Vermonters age 65 and older who have medical conditions may be concerned about the availability of the 2009 H1N1 vaccine. Older adults, who have historically been most likely to seek seasonal flu vaccine, may be frustrated with their lack of access to H1N1 vaccine.

The Centers for Disease Control & Prevention's (CDC) priority for people age 65 and older is to have them receive their seasonal flu vaccine if it is available, and to seek medical advice quickly if they develop flu-like symptoms. People age 65 and older who are health care workers, or have close contact with infants under 6 months of age, are included in the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) target groups to receive early doses of 2009 H1N1 vaccine. Below is language that may be useful for answering questions from older adults about the 2009 influenza season.

Epidemiology of 2009 H1N1 Influenza and Persons age 65 and Older

The unusual feature of 2009 H1N1 influenza is that people age 65 and older have been the least likely to be infected. There has been less 2009 H1N1 illness in people 65 and older compared to younger people since this novel virus emerged. While there is a limited vaccine supply, vaccination programs and health care providers are focusing on the specific target groups that are at higher risk of getting infected, or getting severe infection compared to others.

Older People with Influenza Symptoms

People age 65 and older should seek medical advice as soon as possible if they develop flu symptoms this season to determine whether they might need medical evaluation and treatment with antiviral medications. Providers may consider making a plan to start antiviral medications as soon as flu symptoms begin. It is very important that older people be evaluated quickly, because if they do get 2009 H1N1 influenza they are at higher risk for developing influenza complications.

Seasonal Influenza and Pneumococcal Vaccines

The seasonal influenza vaccine is still a high priority for older people and, if not already vaccinated, they should get a seasonal flu vaccine if it is available. The pneumococcal vaccine is also recommended for people age 65 and older to help prevent bacterial pneumonia, which can be a life-threatening complication.

Availability of 2009 H1N1 Vaccine for People age 65+

While people 65 and older not included in the target groups (health care workers, caregivers for infants under 6 months of age) are not recommended for the earliest doses of vaccine, they can receive the 2009 H1N1 influenza vaccine once the Vermont Department of Health announces that the vaccine can be given outside the priority groups.