

News Release – 2 pages

From the Knox County Health Department

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Local public health officials continue preparations for two different flu shots

“The death of a young, pregnant woman in Columbus is a grim reminder of the seriousness of the H1N1 virus,” said Knox County Health Commissioner Dennis Murray. “And it reinforces that young people and pregnant women are at high risk to be affected by this new virus.”

The H1N1 virus which first surfaced in the spring, has been circulating throughout the summer across the U.S. and is expected to return in full force this fall. On Thursday, Columbus health officials confirmed the first Franklin County resident to die from complications of the H1N1 virus. A vaccine to prevent H1N1 is currently being tested and federal health officials are projecting its availability in late October. “When it does become available, it will be free and given first to those at high risk,” said Murray.

The top priority groups to receive the H1N1 vaccine are: pregnant women; children ages six months through 18 years of age; young adults ages 18-24; household contacts of children younger than six months of age; healthcare and emergency medical service personnel; and people aged 25-64 who have chronic health conditions.

“Based on what we have seen so far, older adults have not been significantly affected by the H1N1 virus, so the vaccine is not being highly recommended for them right now,” said Murray. “However, we do expect the vaccine to be made available to this group later on.”

Federal health officials say there will be no shortage of the H1N1 vaccine, but it will probably not arrive all at once. Therefore, the first shipments, expected in late October, will be for those at most risk in the priority groups including pregnant women, children ages six months to four years of age.

In the meantime, public health officials are publicizing the symptoms of the H1N1 virus, making plans for clinics to give the vaccine when available and encouraging those who might be sick to stay home and contact their physicians if symptoms worsen.

The H1N1 flu has similar symptoms to seasonal flu including fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. A significant number of people who have been infected with this virus also have reported diarrhea and vomiting. H1N1 also seems to be characterized by a high fever (100 degrees or higher) and a severe headache.

While local health officials wait for the delivery of the H1N1 vaccine, they are preparing to deal with seasonal flu. Vaccine for seasonal flu is given in the fall. The seasonal flu usually affects Ohio residents in February and March. Shots for seasonal flu are starting to be offered at different locations in the county. On Tuesday, the Kroger pharmacy began offering seasonal flu vaccine. Seasonal flu shots are expected to be available at several local pharmacies and doctor's offices in the next few weeks. The Knox County Health Department will conduct a series of six community clinics beginning Oct. 1 and culminating with the annual drive-thru clinic at the Knox County Fairgrounds on Oct. 17. There will be a charge for the seasonal flu shot.

“We strongly urge everyone to get a seasonal flu shot,” said Murray. “Regardless of what happens with the H1N1 virus, we expect to see seasonal flu in our community and we want people to be prepared.”

Like the upcoming shots for H1N1, seasonal flu shots are also highly recommended for pregnant women and children, specifically children ages 6 months to 18 years of age. Others highly recommended for the seasonal flu shot include people 50 years of age and older, those with high risk health conditions such as heart, lung and kidney disease, diabetes, asthma, anemia and other blood disorders; and caregivers for children less than 5 years old, adults over 50 years of age and persons with high risk health conditions.

Seasonal flu vaccine for children will be available through the health department and as well a few local pediatricians. “We are hoping to receive our pediatric seasonal flu vaccine by the end of September,” said Murray.

For more information, the health department refers everyone to its website, www.knoxhealth.com where information is updated on the What's New page.