

Oct. 9, 2009

Media contacts:

Dianne Shipley, 941-861-2852; cell 941-302-1058; Dianne_Shipley@doh.state.fl.us

Crystal Pruitt, 941-861-5900; cell 941-650-0695; cpruitt@scgov.net

Scott Ferguson, 941-927-9000, ext. 31148; Scott_Ferguson@sarasota.k12.fl.us

First doses of H1N1 (swine) flu vaccine have arrived

The first 2,100 doses of the H1N1 (swine) flu vaccine, nasal spray FluMist, have arrived in Sarasota County. While the initial quantity is limited, weekly shipments are expected. "We are eagerly awaiting additional vaccine which should be available over the next few weeks," said Chuck Henry, incident commander for the H1N1 vaccination response in Sarasota County.

"After we meet the needs of those most at risk for complications from this virus, the vaccine will be available to all who desire this protection."

The H1N1 nasal spray vaccine is available as an alternative to the standard H1N1 flu shot. Since it is a live but weakened virus vaccine, it will be available only for healthy people ages 2 to 49. The initial vaccine supplies will be made available to private pediatrician practices. It will also be available to the Health Department's pediatricians throughout the county.

The Sarasota County Health Department (SCHD) is following the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines to ensure those at the highest risk for H1N1 (swine) flu and its related complications are vaccinated first. The health department is working with local pediatricians, OB/GYN physicians, Children's Medical Services, the federally funded WIC program, and other entities that serve pregnant women and families with children under six-months of age to make the H1N1 nasal spray and traditional injection vaccine available to them when vaccine supplies arrive. While the vaccine is free, private healthcare providers may charge an administration fee. This fee is covered by most major insurance plans, including Medicare and Medicaid.

Once these needs have been met, the SCHD will work with the school district to provide the vaccine to middle and high school youth during the school day. Only children who have written parental consent will be vaccinated. Elementary school students, accompanied by their parent/legal guardian, will be vaccinated at school-based clinics on Friday evenings and Saturdays. Children age nine and under will need two doses of vaccine, given at least three weeks apart, to get the best protection. Those who have received the nasal spray seasonal flu vaccine will have to wait at least 28 days before getting the nasal spray H1N1 vaccine.

The FluMist nasal spray vaccine may be at vaccination clinics that will be held at regional elementary schools, and will require additional medical screening prior to use. In addition to their established children's vaccination clinics, local health officials will use their facilities in Sarasota, Venice and North Port to vaccinate people at no charge on

Saturdays once a steady supply of vaccine is available. Details on those vaccination clinics are forthcoming.

Local public health and school officials are mailing consent forms to parents of middle and high school students along with the required CDC vaccination information sheet in multiple languages. Elementary school students will be bringing this information home from school. Parents and legal guardians are urged to carefully review the information and consult with their healthcare provider or the health department if they have questions about the vaccine.

Residents are encouraged to call the Sarasota County Health Department's flu information line **941-861-2800** or visit www.sarasotahealth.org for updates. H1N1 vaccination safety information is also available online. Those who do not have access to a computer can visit the health kiosks at local libraries across the county. The Sarasota County Call Center has a TDD line, 941-861-1833 available for those who are hearing impaired.

-end-