

NEWS RELEASE

Influenza-like illnesses remain widespread in Alabama

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Alabama has experienced an elevated number of influenza-like illnesses during the past six weeks. About 18 percent of emergency room patients and 9 percent of patients presenting in doctors' offices reported having flu-like symptoms, according to reports from Alabama physicians and hospitals participating in Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's influenza surveillance and the Alabama Incident Management System (AIMS). Of 51 positive specimens tested by the Bureau of Clinical Laboratories last week, 50 were confirmed as 2009 H1N1 influenza. Three to 4 percent of hospital admissions in Alabama were for influenza, and most admissions were among patients in the 25- to 49-year-old age range.

During the first week in October approximately 51,000 doses of H1N1 live virus nasal mist influenza vaccine are expected to be delivered to Alabama for distribution to health care providers for targeted at-risk populations. By Nov. 1 the state of Alabama should receive approximately 500,000 doses of vaccine.

More than 1,000 health care providers in Alabama have indicated they want to order H1N1 influenza vaccine for their patients. Starting at noon Tuesday, licensed health care providers will be able to order H1N1 influenza vaccine through an online ordering system established by the Alabama Department of Public Health. Vaccine will be shipped as soon as it becomes available.

At this time, only one H1N1 immunization is needed for appropriate protection for individuals over 9 years of age. The department will be working with schools to set up voluntary clinics for H1N1 immunization. Written permission will be required.

Shortages of the antiviral medications in some areas have led the health department to release medications from the Strategic National Stockpile to physicians and pharmacists. Of the 700,000 courses stockpiled, more than 64,000 have been distributed. Eight Alabama residents who were positive for H1N1 influenza have died this year, and other potential cases are being investigated. Deaths have occurred in residents of Bullock, Dale, Houston, Jackson, Jefferson, Macon, Montgomery and Russell counties.

The department is also launching a toll-free influenza information hotline for the public today. Call the ADPH Flu Hotline at 877-377-7285 from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday for information and referrals. Other information is available at www.adph.org/

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