

State Senator Robert Mayer The Mayer Memo

Senator Robert Mayer - Serving Butler, Dunklin, New Madrid, Pemiscot, Ripley, Stoddard & Wayne Counties



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Missouri Prepared for a Challenging Flu Season

The state of Missouri is taking significant steps in dealing with the new form of influenza known as the H1N1 virus to help Missourians protect themselves from what is expected to be a very tough flu season. In southeast Missouri, we've already experienced widespread influenza activity with a high number of school absences prompting several school districts in Malden, Kennett, Doniphan, Bloomfield and Neelyville to temporarily shut down school to contain flu outbreaks.

The Department of Health and Senior Services is encouraging Missourians to get the H1N1 vaccine as it becomes available, along with the seasonal flu vaccine, as the seasonal flu vaccine is unlikely to provide protection against the H1N1 virus. According to health department officials, adequate supplies of the H1N1 flu vaccine are now available for high-risk groups, which include pregnant women, children and young adults. With additional shipments on the way, health department officials say the H1N1 flu shots and the vaccine mist should be available soon to everyone who wants them.

Recently, the health department set up a toll-free number to provide around-the-clock H1N1 flu and vaccine information to Missouri residents. The number, 1-877-FLU-4141 (1-877-358-4141) will be answered 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Specialists with the ***H1N1 InfoLine*** will answer questions about flu symptoms, when to seek medical care and ways to limit the spread of the flu, including the new vaccine. Health care professionals can also call the toll-free number for more information about the H1N1 flu and vaccine.

H1N1 flu symptoms include fever, cough and sore throat. Most cases are relatively mild to moderate and do not require treatment. Most people with H1N1 flu can recover at home. They should get plenty of liquids, take over-the-counter medication to reduce their fever and stay home and rest.

Health department officials are encouraging Missourians to do everything they can to prevent the spread of flu and keep their families healthy. Vaccines, including the aerosol mist and the flu shot, are the single best way to prevent influenza, including the new H1N1 flu. The mist version of the H1N1 flu vaccine is recommended for healthy children and adults ages 2 through 49. Because it contains live virus, it is not appropriate for pregnant woman, children under 2 years old or anyone with an underlying health condition such as asthma. These groups should receive an H1N1 flu shot. The H1N1 flu shot is an inactivated vaccine (containing the killed virus) and is approved for use in people six months of age and older, including healthy people, people with chronic medical conditions and pregnant women.

The following groups of people should have priority access to the H1N1 vaccine:

- Pregnant women

- Household contacts and caregivers for children younger than 6 months of age
- Health care and emergency medical services personnel
- All people ages 6 months through 24 years of age
- Persons ages 25 through 64 years who have health conditions associated with higher risk of medical complications from influenza. (Studies show that older people are less at risk because they appear to have some degree of resistance to the virus.)
- People 65 and older are encouraged to get the H1N1 vaccine once those priority groups have been vaccinated.
- In the meantime, people 50 and older are recommended to get a seasonal flu vaccine.

In addition to the vaccine, basic flu prevention practices can help control the spread of the flu, including washing your hands, covering your cough, and staying home from work or school if you are sick.

In the first two weeks of the flu season in Missouri, there were approximately 5,300 cases documented through the state health department compared to single digit numbers at this time in a typical year.

For more information about the flu, go to the state health department's Web site at www.dhss.mo.gov. To learn more about obtaining the H1N1 flu vaccine, please call your local health department at one of the following locations:

- Butler County Health Department — (573) 785-8478
- Dunklin County Health Department — (573) 717-7317
- New Madrid County Health Department — (573) 748-5541
- Pemiscot County Health Department — (573) 359-1656
- Ripley County Health Department — (573) 996-2181
- Stoddard County Health Department — (573) 568-4593
- Wayne County Health Department — (573) 224-3218

As always, if you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by phone at 1-877-291-5584.

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