

## **Watertown Prepares For H1N1 Influenza**

Since the widely publicized outbreak of the H1N1 influenza strain (“swine flu”) last spring, state and federal health officials have been working with local health departments to gear up for vaccination efforts this fall and winter.

In Massachusetts, nearly 1,400 H1N1 influenza cases have been reported, with 11 deaths. Of the 1,400 cases, most have been mild, with fewer than 13 percent requiring hospitalization. About two-thirds of the cases have occurred in people under 18 years of age.

Several cases of H1N1 influenza were confirmed in Watertown last spring. Many more residents reported flu-like symptoms during the same period, but were not tested for confirmation of H1N1.

As a result, the Watertown Health Department convened the “H1N1 Response Team,” made up of town departments (Health, Schools, Police, Fire, and Human Resources) as well as community stakeholders (private schools, businesses, and others). Meetings are held each week to review the latest information and develop plans to provide vaccine to Watertown residents.

There is currently no evidence that H1N1 is any more dangerous than other flu strains. It is, however, a “novel” virus—one that has not been seen before—and is being monitored carefully worldwide for any indication that it is evolving into something more serious.

In the United States, vaccine for H1N1 is in the testing phase right now. The first shipments are expected to arrive in October, with additional supplies to follow.

The CDC\* has identified certain high-risk groups to receive the first available doses of vaccine—pregnant women, families of babies less than six months old, health care workers, and those who are immuno-compromised. School-age children are also a high priority, as evidence indicates that the H1N1 virus targets those under 18 in far higher numbers than adults. Watertown’s Health and School Departments have been working closely together to develop plans to vaccinate school-age children this fall.

While seniors remain a priority group for seasonal flu vaccine, they are less vulnerable to H1N1 and are not among the priority groups for that vaccine.

Two injections of the H1N1 vaccine are required for full immunity, with the second dose administered three to four weeks after the first.

Watertown will offer free clinics this fall for both seasonal flu shots and H1N1 vaccine. The schedule for seasonal flu clinics appears on the Health Department’s website (see link below). H1N1 clinics will be scheduled once vaccine shipment dates are known.

Good hygiene is the best defense against transmission of influenza—seasonal and H1N1. Wash your hands often with soap and water; avoid touching your nose, mouth or eyes; and practice cough etiquette by coughing or sneezing into your arm, not your hands. If you have flu-like symptoms, stay home and avoid contact with others. Keep children with symptoms home from school and other activities.

For more information on the H1N1 influenza, visit the Watertown Health Department at [www.watertown-ma.gov](http://www.watertown-ma.gov).

\* U.S. Centers for Disease Prevention and Control