

Fall is the time for flu protection

Good health is as easy as one, two, three in September, October and November

Every fall the staff at Community Health and Kossuth Regional Health Center gear up for the flu season, but this year a new challenge has been laid before us. In addition to protecting people from the seasonal flu, H1N1 is also a growing concern. We anticipate that an H1N1 vaccine will be available in October and November, so all seasonal flu vaccines need to be administered in September.

Seasonal flu vaccine will be available at a wide variety of community and school-based clinics across Kossuth County and everyone is encouraged to get vaccinated. Our first opportunity for flu shots will be at KRHC's 60th birthday celebration on September 10 from 5 to 7 p.m. Check the Kossuth Regional Health Center website at www.krhc.com for the dates of other upcoming flu clinics. The KRHC clinic in Algona will also be offering walk in flu shots on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. from September 15 to October 1. This is the only time that walk in flu shots will be available through the clinic.

The H1N1 vaccine is still under development and we anticipate that we'll have it available here in Kossuth County by mid to late fall. At this time we are still learning how much vaccine we will have locally, as well as who will be included in the priority group to receive the vaccine first. Those at the greatest risk will likely include pregnant women, caregivers and household contacts of children less than six months of age, health care and emergency medical services personnel, people between the ages of 6 months through 24 years and people ages 25 through 64 years who are at higher risk for novel H1N1 because of chronic health disorders or compromised immune systems. Once the demand for vaccine for the prioritized groups has been met at the local level, program and providers should also begin vaccinating everyone from the ages of 25 through 64 years.

Stay tuned for more details about the H1N1 vaccine, as more information will be available early this fall. In addition to getting vaccinated for the seasonal flu as soon as possible this September, you can also practice healthy behaviors at any time.

First, take everyday actions to stay healthy. Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze and wash hands frequently. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth to prevent the spread of germs and stay home from work and other public places when you are sick. These healthy habits can help protect you from seasonal flu, H1N1 and a variety of communicable diseases.

Second, follow public health advice. The best defense against the influenza is getting your seasonal flu vaccine in September and the H1N1 vaccine as soon as it is available for you.

Lastly, stay informed. The situation with H1N1 and the vaccine available is changing rapidly and it's important to stay up to date. Go to the KRHC website at www.krhc.com

and click on the Community Health tab to find information about H1N1 and seasonal flu, as well as links to other sites with even more details from a state and nation wide perspective. Watch the Algona Channel 4 broadcast schedule for a public access show featuring members of the KRHC answering questions about the flu and the vaccines needed for protection or call the Community Health Flu Hotline for recent updates at 515-295-4451.