



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Public Health
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COMMISSIONER

October 19, 2009

Dear Colleague,

You have probably seen the incorrect media reports stating that the Department of Public Health intends to make the H1N1 vaccine available to prison inmates before it is available to members of the general public. These reports are misleading and factually inaccurate.

The Department of Public Health has already distributed tens of thousands of H1N1 vaccine doses to hundreds of medical sites around the state to begin the vaccination of children, pregnant women and health care workers, consistent with the federal guidance. Our ability to share H1N1 vaccines is dependent on the vaccine manufacturers' ability to produce the vaccine and the federal Centers for Disease Control's (CDC) distribution plan to states. Unfortunately, the timeline associated with the distribution of the vaccines is quite fluid as production estimates vary week to week due to the unprecedented volume and short timetable for planning. Our top priority is and will remain those members of the public who are at greatest risk. Initially that category includes children, pregnant women and health care workers. As supplies allow, we will also target young adults below the age of 25, and 25-64 year olds with certain underlying health conditions. Public clinics will only be held at the point that there is sufficient volume to shift beyond the focus on these target groups. The CDC states that eventually there will be enough H1N1 vaccine to protect anyone in the population who wishes to be immunized.

We will not be sending vaccines to prison settings to vaccinate the general prison population before the vaccine has been made available to the general public. However, health care workers in prison settings will be treated the same as health care workers in other clinical settings and offered the vaccine as supplies allow. As supplies become available, small amounts of vaccine will be made available to prisons for the vaccination of those inmates at greatest risk. For example, female inmates who are pregnant will be offered the vaccine as part of the statewide effort to reduce the likelihood of serious illness among those most vulnerable. Because of national supply shortages, we have not yet determined the date for the distribution of small quantities of vaccine to segments of the prison population at highest risk.

Again, we want to emphasize that plans to vaccinate the general population of prisoners will not begin before there have been opportunities for the general public in the state to be vaccinated.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Auerbach".

John Auerbach