

Update on H1N1

Flu activity is increasing in most of the United States with nearly half of all states reporting widespread influenza activity. So far most of the flu in the United States is H1N1. CDC expects both 2009 H1N1 flu and seasonal flu to cause illness, hospital stays, and deaths this season.

We are asking all Walpole residents to take a four step approach to protecting themselves and their loved ones to fighting the flu.

Step one-please take time to get vaccinated. CDC recommends a yearly seasonal flu vaccine and this year they also stress getting the H1N1 flu vaccine. In the summer we thought that everyone would need two H1N1 vaccines, but after trials of the vaccine, it is now recommended that people ten years and older ONLY need to receive 1 dose to be fully immunized. The Town held its first seasonal flu clinic this past Tuesday and will be holding another (date to be determined after we get more of the vaccines). We will also be holding multiple H1N1 flu vaccine clinics, each targeted to specific groups and ages of people. We will be targeting people at greatest risk for 2009 H1N1 infection or serious complications to receive the first available doses of vaccine including children, young adults age 19-24, pregnant women, and people age 25-64 with chronic health conditions. 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine is important for close contacts of infants less than 6 months of age and healthcare and emergency medical services personnel. The shipments of vaccine have been delayed so although we were hoping to start our clinics in early October-we most likely will not be having clinics until sometime in November BUT we will have them. As soon as we have our supplies, we will be scheduling our clinics on short notice and we are hoping to vaccinate as many people as we can. Please also check with your regular doctors to see when they have their supplies and possibly get your H1N1 vaccines through them (especially pregnant woman and at high risk people).

There are a few myths out there regarding flu vaccine. A flu shot CANNOT cause flu. Some people feel that they are healthy and never get sick so they do not need a flu vaccine. No one has any special immunity from getting the flu. And anyone can have a rare complication from the flu or they can spread the disease to someone who is at high risk. Flu shots do not have many side effects. The one side effect that might occur is a sore arm. Adverse events occur less often with the flu vaccine than with common over the counter drugs and prescribed drugs. If you have any concerns about getting a flu vaccine, you should definitely consult with your physician.

Step two-please take everyday preventive actions.

Hand washing with soap and water is key to stopping the spread of most viruses including the flu virus. If soap and water are not available, please use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Always cough into your inner elbow. Throw away any tissues you use in the trash right after you use them. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Please avoid close contact with sick people. AND if you are sick with flu like illness or your children are sick with flu like illness, please stay home from work or have them stay

home from school for at least 24 hours after your/their fever is gone, except to get medical care or for other necessities. This is the time to plan. Please keep in your house things you will need if you do become sick like any over the counter medicines you may need, soup, soap for washing hands, thermometer, and foods that are easy to digest. Please think now about who can watch your child if they become sick and need to stay home and you need to go to work. It is also important to maintain your strength and ability to take care of others so remember to eat healthy, get plenty of sleep and exercise everyday.

Step three-please take flu antiviral drugs IF your doctor prescribes them.

Some people who get the flu, will just need to stay home and rest. Other people who get seasonal or H1N1 flu will be recommended by their doctor to be treated with antiviral drugs. These are prescription medicines that fight against the flu by keeping flu viruses from reproducing in your body. Antiviral drugs can make the illness milder, make you feel better faster, and may prevent serious flu complications. Antiviral drugs are recommended especially for people who need hospitalization or for people who are sick with flu-like symptoms and who are at increased risk of serious complications such as pregnant women, people 65 and older and people with chronic health conditions. Antiviral drugs work best if started within the first 2 days of symptoms.

Step four-please stay informed.

Please check the Town's website at www.walpole-ma.gov for updates on H1N1. We are continually getting new guidance from the State and CDC on what is happening, who will be targeted for vaccines, how long people should stay home if they are sick (currently the guidance is to stay home for at least 24 hours after you no longer have a fever without the use of fever reducing medicines and regardless of whether or not you are using antiviral drugs). We will also post on the website about when and where we will be holding clinics.

Let's all do our part to keep ourselves and our community healthy!