



**Media Contacts:**  
Pam Davenport  
(801) 468-2757  
Kate Lilja  
(801) 468-2268

**News Release**  
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## **Local Health Departments Prepare for Fall Flu Season**

*Focus is on vaccination, education and surveillance*

(Salt Lake County) – With September right around the corner, the Salt Lake Valley Health Department (SLVHD), along with other local health officials in Utah, has stepped up preparations for the 2009-2010 influenza season. Federal, state and local health departments across the country expect both seasonal and Novel H1N1 strains of influenza will circulate during the upcoming flu season, with the potential to cause widespread illness.

“It is important to note that Utah’s health departments have spent the last five years preparing for a pandemic,” says Gary Edwards, executive director of the SLVHD. “Last spring tested our response plans, and we have spent the summer months improving three main components of our community response - vaccination, education and active surveillance of the disease.”

### **Vaccination**

This year, local health departments will begin vaccination efforts for *seasonal* influenza in September, earlier than the typical October or November timeframe. This earlier push will also allow health departments to better focus on providing the Novel H1N1 vaccine when it arrives later in the season.

“Although the seasonal flu vaccine will not provide protection against Novel H1N1, we are encouraging everyone to get the seasonal flu shot to help protect them from illness this winter,” says Edwards.

Clinical trials are ongoing, so it is not yet known when local health departments will receive their allotments of H1N1 vaccine. “Despite this unknown, we are making every effort to prepare for what promises to be a massive vaccination campaign,” says Edwards.

Vaccine manufacturing companies have also hit a few bumps with the H1N1 vaccine, which most likely means it will arrive in partial shipments at first. Health departments are therefore working closely with community partners to ensure Novel H1N1 vaccine is available for those residents most at risk of complications from influenza which include:

- pregnant women,
- people who live with or care for children younger than 6 months of age,
- health care and emergency medical personnel with direct patient contact,
- children 6 months through 4 years of age, and
- children 5 through 18 years of age who have chronic medical conditions.

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#### Education

Education, the cornerstone of public health, will be even more important this flu season as health departments work to mitigate the effects of Novel H1N1, especially early-on before the vaccine arrives. Hand washing, respiratory etiquette and voluntary isolation will once again be a primary message of prevention, and residents will be urged to ‘stay informed.’

In Salt Lake County, the SLVHD has developed a variety of public resources to ensure immediate and accurate access to the most up-to-date H1N1 information.

“Despite our best efforts, it will be an almost insurmountable challenge to effectively limit the impact of influenza illness if the public is not an active and educated partner,” says Edwards. “Because of this, we have expanded our resources to include a comprehensive website updated every hour, on the hour, an H1N1 email alert system and an educational toolkit, all available at [www.slvhealth.org/h1n1](http://www.slvhealth.org/h1n1).”

In addition to online resources, the public is encouraged to call 2-1-1 (no area code needed) with local H1N1-related questions.

#### Active Surveillance

Over the past five years, the SLVHD and other local health departments have expanded their disease surveillance toolkit to prepare for an influenza pandemic. State-of-the art surveillance tools include:

- **Influenza-like Illness (ILI) Surveillance:** Daily or weekly data on influenza-like illness in Salt Lake County.
- **Syndromic Surveillance:** Local information on common symptoms (fever, cough, sore throat) gathered from local medical centers.
- **Key Indicators:** Local information on number of patients displaying severe influenza illness.
- **Germ Watch:** Local information on positive influenza cases across the Salt Lake Valley.
- **School Surveillance:** Daily or weekly contact with county schools to monitor number of absent students.

“Our active surveillance ensures the health department knows the most detailed information possible about influenza illness across the Salt Lake Valley,” says Ilene Risk, epidemiologist for SLVHD. “Our surveillance tools help provide a complete picture when looking at influenza illness. This, in turn, ensures that our communication with the public and our recommendations for both individuals and organizations is as comprehensive as possible.”

More information on both seasonal and Novel H1N1 is available at [www.slvhealth.org](http://www.slvhealth.org) or [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).

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