



News Release
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SLVHD Urges Residents To Prepare for Fall Flu Season

Increase in illness and deaths expected; residents encouraged to prepare now

(Salt Lake County) – With traditional influenza season underway and H1N1 flu cases starting up again across the country, officials at the Salt Lake Valley Health Department (SLVHD) are warning residents that this flu season may be more severe than Utah has seen in many years.

“The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has predicted that most areas within the United States will experience a Category 2 Pandemic according to their Pandemic Severity Index (PSI) this fall,” says Dr. Dagmar Vitek, medical director for SLVHD.

The PSI is a classification scale for reporting the severity of influenza pandemics. Severity ranges from a least severe Category 1 and escalates to the most severe Category 5. The PSI scale functions much like the category rankings for hurricanes.

Expectations for a Category 2 Pandemic include:

- Between 90,000 - 450,000 deaths
 - Salt Lake County: 687 deaths
- Death rate between 30-50 per 100,000 people
- Illness rate between 20-40% of the population
 - Salt Lake County: 295,822 people (illness rate of 30%)

“Even though we are facing a relatively mild pandemic according to PSI, we are looking at a significant increase in illness and death this fall,” says Vitek. “Because of this, it is important that everyone do all they can to be prepared and educated this fall.”

Research gathered from similar past pandemics indicate that H1N1 cases will increase in September, peak sometime in October, decline in November and continue throughout the winter. With H1N1 vaccine not expected until late October or early November, and a limited initial supply, SLVHD will focus vaccination efforts on those at highest risk of flu complications. Those high-risk priority groups are:

- Pregnant women
- People who live with or care for children younger than 6 months of age
- Healthcare and emergency services personnel
- People 6 months - 24 y/o
- 24-65 with underlying medical conditions

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“There are important things everyone can, and should, do to protect themselves and the ones they love from influenza illness this fall,” says Vitek. “Schools and hospitals have been busy preparing for an increase in influenza, but it doesn’t stop there. Families, businesses and other community organizations should take the proper steps to prepare.” These steps include talking to their employer now about H1N1-specific sick leave policies, setting up alternate childcare and knowing how to limit the spread of H1N1 in the home. More details:
<http://www.slvhealth.org/h1n1/bePrepared.html>.

In addition to frequently washing hands, covering coughs with a tissue or sleeve and staying home until fevers have been gone for 24 hours, Salt Lake County residents should take an active role in staying educated and informed.

“The Salt Lake Valley Health Department has created a myriad of resources to help residents be prepared and educated,” says Gary Edwards, executive director for SLVHD. “These resources are literally at our resident’s fingertips, whether it is calling 2-1-1, accessing our H1N1 website, checking our real-time Twitter feed or subscribing to our email alerts.”

Information resources include:

- H1N1 Email Alerts: <http://www.slvhealth.org/cfml/h1n1/alert/index.cfm>
- SLVHD H1N1 website: <http://www.slvhealth.org/h1n1> (refreshes every hour)
- Twitter feed for real-time updates: <http://www.twitter.com/slvhealthdept>
- Facebook page: <http://www.facebook.com/slvhealthdept>

Comprehensive planning resources for businesses and families are available at www.slvhealth.org/h1n1 and www.flu.gov.

- Information for Employers: <http://www.slvhealth.org/h1n1/employers.html>
- Educational Toolkit: <http://www.slvhealth.org/h1n1/h1n1Toolkit.html>
- **Are you Prepared?** <http://www.slvhealth.org/h1n1/bePrepared.html>
- Toolkit for Schools: <http://www.slvhealth.org/h1n1/school.html>

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