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SLVHD Urges Residents To Prepare for Fall Flu Season

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

Note: Dr. Vitek is available for interviews today from 2:00-3:00 p.m.

(Salt Lake County) – With traditional influenza season underway, 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.

“Based on Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) projections we are expecting to see increases in H1N1 illness soon,” says Dr. Dagmar Vitek, medical director for SLVHD. “We are also expecting the majority of illness to occur in our younger population.”

The current pandemic appears to be relatively mild in comparison to more severe pandemics of the past. Still, it’s expected that Salt Lake County will see a hundred or more deaths this year than in a traditional flu season. With the heightened status, county residents are urged to be prepared and on alert 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,” says Vitek. With H1N1 vaccine not expected until late October/early November and a limited initial supply, residents should know that not everyone will receive a vaccination.

Eligible priority groups to receive the H1N1 vaccine 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 through 24 years of age
- People ages 25 through 64 years with chronic health disorders such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), diabetes, chronic cardiovascular disease and those with compromised immune systems.

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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.”

County residents should begin talking to their employers about H1N1-specific sick leave policies. Those with children would be wise to plan ahead for alternate childcare, as well as know how to limit the spread of H1N1 at 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 fever have been gone for 24 hours, Salt Lake County residents are encouraged to 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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