



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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School-based H1N1 influenza clinics to begin for K-3 students

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Alabama Department of Public Health will begin offering nasal mist flu vaccine to kindergarten through third grade students in Alabama schools at voluntary H1N1 influenza vaccination clinics. A few clinics will begin the week of Nov. 23, but the majority will be held beginning the week of Nov. 30-Dec. 5.

“Vaccination is the best way to protect your children from this potentially serious disease,” said State Health Officer Dr. Donald Williamson. “We’re very concerned about the impact of widespread H1N1 influenza, including the 32 documented deaths in Alabama. Research indicates that it is far safer to receive the vaccination than to become ill with the disease. We encourage everyone to be vaccinated as soon as vaccine becomes available.”

The nasal mist vaccine (live, attenuated intranasal vaccine) is sprayed into each nostril and is not an injection. The 2009 H1N1 influenza nasal spray vaccine does not contain thimerosal or other preservatives. This nasal mist vaccination is the first of two doses needed for children aged 9 years and under. The second dose should be given about four weeks later to protect children from the novel H1N1 influenza virus.

Beginning this week, Alabama parents will be sent packets containing a vaccine information statement informing them about the vaccine and the disease, and will be given a consent form to sign if they want their child vaccinated. Only students in these grades with signed parental consent forms will be given the H1N1 nasal mist vaccine. No fees will be charged.

State Superintendent of Education Dr. Joseph Morton said, “We strongly encourage parents to be proactive and treat the spread of this disease very seriously. This is undoubtedly an instance where prevention is the key and our children are depending on us to keep them healthy.

“The State Department of Education and the Alabama Department of Public Health have worked tirelessly, hand-in-hand, to keep the public informed since the onset of this disease. Now it is important that parents provide consent so their children can be given the best care possible.”

Parents whose children have compromised immune systems or have long-term health problems are advised to take their children to their physician, another health care provider or county health department to obtain an injectable influenza vaccine. In addition, children who have close

contact with a person with a severely weakened immunized system, such as a person requiring care in a protected environment, should not receive the vaccine in nasal mist form.

Children with the following conditions **should not** get the nasal mist vaccine:

- Severe, life-threatening allergies to eggs or allergies to any other substance in the vaccine
- Weakened immune system
- Long-term health problems
 - o Heart disease
 - o Lung disease
 - o Asthma
 - o Kidney or liver disease
 - o Diabetes or other metabolic disease
 - o Anemia and other blood disorders
- Muscle or nerve disorders (such as cerebral palsy) that can lead to breathing or swallowing problems

- Children on long-term aspirin treatment

Children who are moderately or severely ill should wait until recovering before getting the vaccine, but those with a mild cold or other minor illness may be vaccinated.

“If you would like your child to receive the nasal spray vaccine, please read the information in your registration packet, and sign and return the consent form to your child’s school by the deadline,” Dr. Morton advised. Both English and Spanish-language packets are available for parents.

The viruses in the nasal-spray vaccine are weakened and do not cause severe symptoms often associated with influenza illness. In children, side effects from the nasal mist vaccine can include runny nose, wheezing, headache, vomiting, muscle aches and fever.

At this time, the vaccine is available through health care providers and county health departments for pregnant women; children, adolescents and adults through 24 years of age; adults 25 through 64 years of age with medical conditions such as asthma and diabetes; close contacts of children younger than 6 months old; and health care and emergency medical services personnel.

Since July there have been 32 known influenza-associated deaths in Alabama. The counties of residence and numbers of influenza-associated deaths are as follows: Baldwin, 1; Bullock, 2; Calhoun, 1; Cherokee, 1; Colbert, 1; Dale, 1; Elmore, 1; Escambia, 1; Houston/Pike, 1; Jackson, 2; Jefferson, 4; Lee, 1; Macon, 1; Madison, 1; Mobile, 2; Montgomery, 3; Morgan, 1; Russell, 1; Shelby, 2; and Talladega, 3; and Walker, 1.

For more information about H1N1 influenza, visit www.adph.org or call Alabama’s toll-free flu hotline at 1-877-377-7285 from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday except state holidays. Messages left after hours will be returned the following day.