

Influenza Planning at the Local Level

Even though it is finally time to enjoy some long-awaited summer weather, data from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) suggests that it is also time to appropriately plan for another outbreak of the novel H1N1 influenza virus. Although occurrence of influenza slows down during the summer months, new cases are being reported every day. It has already affected my family. As of this writing, my nephew in West Haven is recovering after several tough weeks of illness.

Epidemiologists and virologists are closely monitoring the southern hemisphere, where they are experiencing winter weather, to help determine how the virus may spread this coming fall and winter here in the United States. There is a race to manufacture a vaccine and government officials are preparing guidelines for targeted populations and priorities for circumstances of a limited or phased in supply. Preliminary findings suggest that the targeted population will be pregnant women, children ages 0-24, elderly adults and adults with medical conditions that increase the risk of complications of influenza.

Your local officials, including me, Assistant Health Director Bill Milardo, Emergency Management Director Francis Willett, have been meeting all summer to plan for a vaccination program to reduce the health and societal impacts of the H1N1 and seasonal flu viruses. Our Chiefs of Service Harry Hall and Scott Wright and others will also participate. The Town of Durham is part of a CT Department of Health region called Mass Dispensing Area 36 (MDA 36) that includes the city of Middletown and the towns of Middlefield and Haddam. We are preparing a drill exercise to deliver mass vaccinations. The plan is to administer seasonal flu vaccinations, however, the drill may turn into the "real deal" if the H1N1 vaccine is ready. The Point of Distribution (POD) will be at Freeman Athletic Complex in Middletown. The triage center for Durham will be at our Emergency Operation Center (EOC) on the Durham Fairgrounds. Details will be disseminated as we get closer, but I wanted to assure you that a planning process is underway. The regular seasonal flu clinic will be held at the EOC on October 16th details also forthcoming.

State of Connecticut public health officials met with our local health officials and RSD13 personnel, including Superintendent Susan Viccaro, to offer guidelines to schools. They are preparing Public Service Announcements and other publications for parents and students to follow. Before school begins, town and school officials will meet to solidify our response plan to possible influenza outbreaks.

Stay tuned, more information and guidance will follow. In the meantime, please do what you can to stay healthy. Influenza is thought to spread mainly person-to person through coughing or sneezing from infected people. Take precautions such as; cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and immediately dispose of the tissue; wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing and use alcohol-based cleansers; avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth which can spread germs; stay home if you get sick and limit contact with others.

Enjoy what's left of the summer, it's going by too quickly. Be healthy and be safe!

