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PANDEMIC H1N1 VACCINE AVAILABLE FOR PREGNANT WOMEN

BUTTE COUNTY, Calif. — Many local obstetricians recently received allocations of H1N1 (swine) flu vaccine, and pregnant women should not delay in getting it, according to Butte County Public Health Department.

“Pregnant women are about six times more likely than other healthy adults to develop severe complications after infection with pandemic H1N1 flu”, stated Mark Lundberg, M.D., Health Officer for Butte County. “We recommend that all pregnant women contact their obstetricians to see if vaccine has arrived and, if so, schedule an appointment to get vaccinated.”

Flu in general, both seasonal and pandemic H1N1, causes more complications in otherwise healthy pregnant women because of normal changes to their immune, cardiac, and respiratory systems. These changes do not appear to make a pregnant woman more susceptible to getting influenza, but are clearly linked to an increase in complications related to influenza. Pregnant women with underlying health conditions are at even higher risk of complications related to influenza.

Lundberg recommends that pregnant women receive both the seasonal flu vaccine and the pandemic H1N1 vaccine. Both vaccines can be given by shot or by nasal spray, but pregnant women should get the "flu shot"—a vaccine made with killed flu virus. The seasonal flu shot has been given to millions of pregnant women over many years and has not been shown to cause harm to pregnant women or their babies. The pandemic H1N1 flu vaccine is being made in the same way and at the same places where the seasonal flu vaccine is made, and is expected to have the same excellent safety record.

Some people may have heard that thimerosal (a mercury preservative in vaccine that comes in multi-dose vials) is harmful to a pregnant woman or a fetus. Scientific studies have not shown this to be true, according to Lundberg. For people who are still concerned, vaccine companies have made preservative-free seasonal flu vaccine and pandemic H1N1 flu vaccine in single-dose syringes for pregnant women and small children. In California, preservative-free vaccine for pregnant women is required by law.

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Pregnant women should practice other ways of preventing flu as well, such as washing hands often; avoiding touching eyes, nose and mouth; and staying away from sick people. If a pregnant woman does develop flu-like symptoms (including some or all of the following: fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills, and tiredness), she should call her health care provider right away. For pregnant women, early treatment with antiviral medicine is important and can make a big difference. Treatment within 2 days of when symptoms start is best, but some studies have suggested benefit of antiviral treatment even when treatment was started more than 48 hours after the onset of symptoms.

As more information on pandemic H1N1 vaccine becomes available it will be posted on the Butte County Public Health website at www.buttecounty.net/publichealth and on our toll-free information line at 1-866-444-2405. For more information on pregnant women and the flu, visit the CDC website at: <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidance/pregnant.htm>.

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Butte County Public Health Department

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