



**Dora**

Department of Regulatory Agencies

Division of Insurance

**NEWS RELEASE**

**For Immediate Release – Sept 3, 2009**

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### **Commissioner of Insurance Urges Health Carriers to Plan for H1N1 Vaccinations**

The coming influenza season is expected to be challenging, especially due to the potential for pandemic H1N1 influenza A to cause widespread disease. Because coordinated efforts by all sectors will help to minimize the impact of influenza on the state and its economy, DORA's Division of Insurance is asking health carriers for their assistance in responding to the pandemic.

"We believe that health carriers can play a critical role in facilitating access to treatment and vaccinations," said Insurance Commissioner Marcy Morrison. "Their involvement is also essential in educating consumers about flu prevention strategies and treatment options."

A new Colorado law, which goes into effect Jan. 1, 2010, mandates coverage for influenza vaccinations as recommended by Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices. However, in order to be effective this season, it is recommended that people who want flu shots receive both seasonal flu and H1N1 flu vaccinations before January.

While the direct cost of the H1N1 vaccine supply is being borne by the federal government, the cost of administering the vaccine must be addressed for the vaccination campaign to be successful. Since the recommended novel H1N1 vaccination schedule is likely to require two or more health care provider visits, it is important that costs to health care providers for vaccine administration are not passed on to patients, creating a financial barrier for them to participate in the vaccination effort.

The novel H1N1 virus, a new strain of influenza A, was first detected in people in the United States in April, 2009. So far, more than 60 hospitalized cases have been reported in Colorado. The virus has remained active throughout the state during the summer, and more cases are expected this fall and winter. The pandemic already has had an impact across the country. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that infections already have occurred in more than one million people nationwide.

With only a few exceptions worldwide, the pandemic H1N1 strain remains sensitive to several antiviral medications. Commissioner Morrison said her expectation is that private health carriers operating in Colorado will cover administration costs for this vaccine in the same way that other immunization visits are covered, including those for the seasonal flu vaccine.

While it is not possible to predict exactly what the pandemic virus will do next, recent experience in the Southern Hemisphere and elsewhere suggests that an escalation in cases will occur in the coming months. Waves of pandemic infection may put considerable stress on the state's health care system, particularly hospital emergency departments and ambulatory clinics. In addition, the pandemic may cause significant increases in absenteeism, stretching the ability of businesses, schools and other work sites to function normally.

The importance of immunization against seasonal flu is in no way diminished by the recent focus on pandemic H1N1 disease. Seasonal flu vaccine already is available in Colorado, and people, particularly those traditionally at high risk for serious complications from seasonal flu, are encouraged to get immunized earlier than usual this year. However, the seasonal flu vaccine does not protect against novel H1N1 flu.

For more information on the H1N1 virus, see the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's (CDPHE) Web site at [www.colorado.gov/nofluforyou](http://www.colorado.gov/nofluforyou), the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website on H1N1 flu at <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/> or U.S. Health and Human Services' site at [www.flu.gov](http://www.flu.gov).

CDPHE provides a fact sheet on the virus in Colorado:  
<http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/epr/Public/H1N1/SwineFAQ.pdf>.

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