

WINK News - Southwest Florida

Poll: Almost half of Americans won't get H1N1 vaccine

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PORT CHARLOTTE, Fla. - A new survey finds nearly half of Americans do not plan to get the new H1N1 swine flu vaccine.

The numbers came on the same day the government introduced a new checklist to help people figure out if they have the illness.

ER doctors at Fawcett Memorial Hospital in Port Charlotte say the patients they've seen with swine flu describe it the same way: it feels like they've been hit by a truck. Yet many Americans say there's still too much uncertainty about the swine flu vaccine to consider getting it.

"I think the overall benefit would be much better than the risk, much like any vaccine," said infectious disease specialist, Dr. Mark Asparilla. "We're on the second cycle now, and like what happened in the 1918 epidemic, the second/third cycle could be worse."

An Associated Press survey finds just 52-percent of Americans plan on getting the swine flu vaccine. The poll found people 65 and older want it the most: two-thirds plan to get the shot. But doctors say their age group isn't the most at risk.

"The deaths in swine flu have been in younger people, people you'd think have been otherwise healthy, yet they're the ones taking the brunt of it," said Dr. Marc Melsner, president of the Charlotte Medical Society.

The federal government unveiled its updated flu.gov website on Wednesday, with answers to questions, and a self-evaluation guide for people who think they may have the illness. Vaccinations are still the most recommended prevention tool.

Charlotte County, like many others, is planning mass vaccination clinics once the shot becomes available.

"There's no cost for the vaccine, the vaccine is not a mandatory vaccine, the vaccine is absolutely voluntary," said Adam DuBois of the Charlotte County Health Department.

Charlotte County will release its vaccination clinic plan as the first doses arrive in the next few weeks.