

First doses of H1N1 vaccine arrive in Sarasota

By ANNE KLOCKENKEMPER STAFF WRITER

SARASOTA COUNTY — The first 2,100 doses of H1N1 vaccine — in FluMist form — arrived in Sarasota County on Thursday evening, and had been mostly distributed by Friday afternoon.

Twenty-seven locations — including the Sarasota County Health Department, which is in charge of the distribution of the swine flu vaccine — received the doses.

“We had that entire allotment shipped to the health department, then we delivered that to pediatricians who had asked for it. Such a small amount went relatively quickly,” said Chuck Henry, incident commander for the H1N1 vaccination response in Sarasota County. “Most of our vaccines were focused where we have existing child health concerns, primarily the 17th Street Clinic (in Sarasota) and North Port Clinic.”

Henry said 400 to 500 doses went to the four health department clinics; the remainder went to pediatricians in the community.

“Every pediatrician that asked for vaccine in this round got a portion of what they asked for,” he said.

The SCHD has ordered about 3,600 more doses of the vaccine — both the FluMist and injectable varieties — that should be delivered within seven to 10 days.

As the federal government makes stock of the vaccine available, amounts are posted for order by health departments. Pediatricians and private doctors offices can also place orders with the health department. The vaccine is then shipped to the health department, or, for doctors who have ordered 100 doses or more, directly to their offices.

“We recommend people contact their pediatricians and simply ask if have vaccine available,” Henry said. “There is no need for anyone to panic or worry. Allocations are coming in and there will be more each week.”

The vaccine is provided free to the health department and to doctor’s offices where it is shipped directly, Henry said. Some private health care providers may charge an administration fee, which is covered by most major insurance plans, Medicare and Medicaid.

Middle and high school students with parental permission will receive vaccinations at school. Elementary students, accompanied by a parent or guardian, will be vaccinated at school-based clinics on Friday evenings and Saturdays. Children age 9 and under will need two doses of the vaccine, given at least three weeks apart, to get the best protection. Those who have received the nasal spray seasonal flu vaccine will have to wait at least 28 days before getting the nasal spray H1N1 vaccine.

Henry said consent forms are currently being printed and will be mailed to parents of middle and high school students along with a required vaccination information sheet. Elementary school students will bring the information home from school.

“Actually, they should hit the mail probably on Monday or Tuesday,” he said, adding the health department and Sarasota County school district would like to hold the inschool clinics as soon as enough vaccine is available. “I don’t really want to put dates on it, but I anticipate late October, early November.”

In **Charlotte County**, the **health department** hopes to have the swine flu vaccine by the end of next week. With five different manufacturers producing different variations, the department will wait to see which vaccine arrives and tailor the disbursement plan accordingly.

“We don’t really know when it will arrive,” health department spokesman Adam DuBois said. “There’s no notification system. We know it’s on its way, and we’ll get it when we get it.”

Susan Smith, communications press officer with the Florida Department of Health, said the one county might receive vaccine before another depending “on when they placed their order.”

Sarasota County has seen four deaths resulting from the H1N1 virus — three men ages 22, 27 and 47, and a 10-month-old North Port girl. Charlotte County has reported one death, a 46-year-old Port Charlotte woman.

Residents can call the Sarasota County Health Department’s flu information line at 941-861-2800 or visit www.sarasotahealth.org for updates.

Staff writer Josh Salmon contributed to this report.