

Swine flu vaccine available to public

By **JOSH SALMAN STAFF WRITER**

PUNTA GORDA — Charlotte County residents will have their first opportunity today to get vaccinated for the H1N1 virus, commonly known as the swine flu.

The Health Department will roll out the public vaccination clinic from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Charlotte Harbor Event and Conference Center in Punta Gorda. Both nasal and injectable vaccines will be available.

The free clinic will be the first of many to come under the Health Department's blanket vaccination plan, department spokesman Adam DuBois said.

"Obviously we have a limited amount of doses as the shipments are still coming in slowly," DuBois said. "But we plan to vaccinate everybody who wants it."

The clinic will focus on those in the general public who fall into one of the targeted priority groups:

- Pregnant women
- Health care personnel
- Residents ages 6 months to 64 years who have high risk of influenza complications.

The Health Department also will distribute about 1,200 doses of nasal spray to all healthy residents ages 2 through 49.

The department plans to vaccinate some 3,000 residents today.

"We want to vaccinate our high-priority groups first," DuBois said. "But we will have nasal vaccinations available to the public. If people feel like they should get it, it's important for them to come in."

Symptoms of H1N1 include fever, headache, dry cough, runny nose and body aches.

Aside from getting vaccinated, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has advised people to reduce their risk by frequently washing hands, covering coughs with a sleeve, maintaining a 6-foot social distance and staying home if any symptoms arise.

Physicians will be at today's clinic to ensure each person receives the appropriate vaccine. The Health Department is also encouraging interested attendees to visit its Web site and review the H1N1 vaccine information sheets, and print a completed consent form to expedite the visit.

The county hopes to complete its voluntary mass-vaccination plan by early next year.

"The Health department is doing an excellent job with their swine flu plan," Commissioner Bob Starr said. "The sticking points have been the availability of the vaccines, but the county has a good plan for reaching the people."

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