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Media Advisory

Who: Dr. Cathy Slemp, State Health Officer
West Virginia Bureau for Public Health

What: Press Conference to explain H1N1 Flu Vaccine Availability and Use

When: Monday, October 26, 2009 1:00 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.

Where: West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources
Division of Threat Preparedness
505 Capitol Street Suite 200
Charleston, West Virginia 25305

Details:

Dr. Cathy Slemp, State Health Officer and the physician tasked with leading the fight against H1N1 in West Virginia, will issue a statement regarding H1N1 (swine flu) vaccine availability and share current vaccine projections over the next few months, sharing where we are now in this multi-month effort. While October supply chains have provided less vaccine than originally projected by manufacturers, frustrating many, overall supply is expected to be the same.

Dr. Slemp will explain how H1N1 vaccine is being used in communities and why the public may see different initial approaches in different jurisdictions. There are good but different reasons to vaccinate all 5 target groups (explained at briefing) and little science to suggest one is more important to vaccinate over another. Many factors feed into what a local health department does with supply available at any given time. The five groups targeted for the first several weeks to months of vaccine (pregnant women, caregivers of children less than 6 months, all person 6 months to 24 years, people 25-64 with underlying conditions, and health care workers) make up a significant portion of the state's population (approximately 50%). While not every member of the target groups will seek vaccination, vaccine received to date is only sufficient to reach approximately 2-3% of the state's population explaining frustrations and challenges in accessing vaccine. Availability will increase in time, however, and enough vaccine is expected by January for anyone who wants to be vaccinated (including beyond initial target groups).

Dr. Slemp will also provide a brief update on seasonal flu vaccine availability and explain focal shortages of this vaccine. More seasonal flu vaccine has been made this year than usual and has been used by more people earlier than ever before. Some supply will continue to flow into the state through at least November, but it is not known if supply will meet demand given increased awareness about flu. Slemp will urge residents to continue following both situations, to learn about the new H1N1 vaccine, and to get vaccinated when possible. Vaccine is the best protection against flu.