

## Emphasis on H1N1 shouldn't distract seniors from seasonal flu

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

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With all the focus on 2009 H1N1's impact on young people this year, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment is reaching out to seniors 65 and older and caregivers of this age group to remind them that they are at high risk for seasonal influenza, not H1N1, and should receive their seasonal vaccination.

State health officials have heard from concerned seniors that they feel overlooked this year in not being considered a priority group for receiving the H1N1 vaccine. "Seniors 65 and older are not at high risk for H1N1 influenza because of previous exposure to a similar virus.

However, this does not mean they can't get H1N1 and are encouraged to also receive their H1N1 vaccination," said Margaret Huffman, Immunization Outreach and Clinical Services Program manager at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment.

"Seniors' priority should be on getting their seasonal flu vaccine as they are and always have been considered high risk for seasonal influenza. Seasonal flu wreaks the most havoc with the senior population, especially those with chronic health conditions like diabetes and cardiac disease, or those who are smokers," said Huffman.

Every year, more than 36,000 persons die from flu in the United States, and the majority of these deaths are among seniors.

Huffman said the unprecedented focus on H1N1 influenza this year has caused an increase in demand for seasonal flu vaccine, which has unfortunately been available in very limited supply this year. "We know this has made it difficult for seniors to get their seasonal flu vaccination. Fortunately, additional doses of seasonal flu vaccine are arriving in Colorado each week. Seniors are advised to check with their health care provider for the vaccine, or visit [www.immunizecolorado.com](http://www.immunizecolorado.com) for locations offering the vaccine." Unlike H1N1 which has been infecting Coloradans for months, seasonal flu has yet to arrive in the state to any significant degree. While H1N1 appears to have peaked in Colorado, seasonal flu generally doesn't peak until mid-winter.

Huffman said, "There is still time to receive your seasonal flu vaccine. We believe you will be

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protected from influenza if you receive the vaccine at this time, or into January 2010." While the H1N1 vaccine also has been slow to arrive in Colorado, higher amounts of vaccine are arriving weekly.

In addition to vaccinations, seniors also can be protected from flu by ensuring that people they come into contact with are vaccinated. "This is an important safeguard because as we age our immune response to vaccination may not be as robust as when we were younger. Older citizens really need their younger peers to first protect themselves from flu," said Huffman.

Seniors, and others, looking for a seasonal flu vaccination should first contact their physician. If vaccination isn't available there, visit [www.immunizecolorado.com](http://www.immunizecolorado.com) site for a list of vaccination clinics for both seasonal and 2009 H1N1 flu.