



For Immediate Release

### Influenza Update

At a news conference on Thursday, September 24 led by the Chief Medical Officer of Health for Ontario, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care announced the plan for publicly-funded vaccinations against seasonal flu and the H1N1 flu virus.

The two vaccines offer coverage for different strains of influenza, both expected to be circulating this flu season.

This year it's a different flu season, and the vaccination schedule has been adjusted to reflect that difference. In a three-phase process, Ontario will:

- Provide seasonal flu shots to those aged 65 and over and residents of long-term care homes in October.
- Provide the H1N1 flu vaccination for all Ontarians in November.
- Resume seasonal flu vaccination in December and January.

For those in the Northwestern Health Unit area, this means a delay in the regularly scheduled seasonal influenza mass immunization clinics held in communities across the region in years past.

**Why the change?** H1N1 is expected to be the dominant flu strain this season, so everyone is encouraged to get vaccinated against the H1N1 flu virus once the vaccine becomes available in November. However for those 65 years or older, seasonal influenza remains a big concern because scientific evidence shows seniors are at highest risk of serious complications from seasonal flu. All seniors as well as all residents of long-term care homes are therefore asked to get the seasonal flu vaccine in October.

For persons younger than 65, the Ministry is recommending H1N1 vaccination prior to seasonal influenza vaccination. This is because of some unpublished studies that show a possible link between past seasonal flu vaccination and the risk of infection with the H1N1 flu virus.

Dr. James Arthurs, Acting Medical Officer of Health at the Northwestern Health Unit states "we are supportive of the Ministry's recommendations on phasing the vaccines in three stages, given the emerging evidence."

If you are 65 years of age or older and wish to receive seasonal influenza vaccine in October, call your local health unit office for information on appointments and clinic times.

The Northwestern Health Unit will begin immunizing with the H1N1 vaccine in November and, after everyone in the area who needs and wants it has received it, will resume community-based seasonal influenza mass immunization clinics.

Dr. Arthurs also wishes to reassure people that the Northwestern Health Unit will not deny the seasonal flu shot to anyone who wants it prior to getting the H1N1 flu vaccine. "As long as we can be sure that people fully understand the potential risks and benefits, they can be immunized against seasonal influenza when they want it." Those interested are asked to contact their local public health nurse.

-30-

Dr. James Arthurs  
Medical Officer of Health (A)  
Northwestern Health Unit  
[jarthurs@nwhu.on.ca](mailto:jarthurs@nwhu.on.ca)  
1-800-830-5978 ext. 252