

Missourians can call a new toll-free number for information about the H1N1 flu.

The number, 1-877-FLU-4141 (1-877-358-4141), will be answered 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

H1N1 Flu InfoLine specialists will answer questions about flu symptoms, when to seek medical care and the new H1N1 flu vaccine, now available at locations throughout the state. Medical professionals will be available to assist with the calls.

The Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services is urging Missouri residents to get the H1N1 vaccine as it becomes available in their community.

Pregnant women, children and young adults are most at risk of contracting the H1N1 flu, so they will be given priority to receive the vaccine first. Studies show that older people are less at risk because they appear to have some degree of resistance to the virus.

The vaccine comes in an inhalable aerosol mist form, and an injectable form. The mist version of the flu vaccine can be used by healthy children and adults ages 2 through 49. Because it contains live virus, the flu mist is not appropriate for pregnant women, children under 2 years old or anyone with an underlying health condition such as asthma. Those groups should receive an H1N1 flu shot.

According to health department officials, adequate supplies of the flu vaccine will be available for the high risk groups. As additional shipments of the vaccine arrive in Missouri, flu shots or mist should be available to everyone who wants them.

H1N1 flu symptoms include fever, cough and sore throat. The majority of cases are relatively mild to moderate and do not require medical treatment. Most people with the H1N1 flu can recover at home. They should drink plenty of fluids, take fever-reducing medication, and stay home and rest.

Pregnant women and people with underlying health conditions who think they might have the flu should contact their health care provider.

In addition to the vaccine, basic flu prevention practices can help control the spread of the flu:

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue or the inside of your elbow, not your bare hands.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Stay home when you are sick, especially if you have a fever. Remain at home until 24 hours after your fever is gone without the use of fever-reducing medication.

For more information about the flu, go to the state health department's web site at www.dhss.mo.gov. To learn more about obtaining the H1N1 flu vaccine, Missourians should call their local health department.

The H1N1Flu InfoLine is sponsored by the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services.