

## Pediatric Influenza Information

### A Message From Dr. Eadline

This has been a very confusing flu season for parents, patients and even providers. Seasonal Influenza is always a challenge each fall and now this year we have H1N1 Influenza or Swine Flu to contend with. The media has been rushing to get information out to all of you but there have been some missteps along the way. Hopefully I can set get some concerns straightened out and answer most of your questions.

Let's talk about Seasonal Flu first. In Pediatrics we have had this program in place for many years but as of several years ago we have been recommending "universal" vaccination which essentially means all pediatric patients between 6 months and 18 years of age. This is recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics and the CDC. Your Pediatricians here at Slocum-Dickson also recommend it. If you are 6 months to just under 9 years of age and you get the Seasonal Flu vaccine for the first time we recommend a booster dose a month after the first. The year after this takes place and all years following you do not need a booster dose. Side effects are minimal with local pain reactions and redness possible. Fever is rare and most people feel well 24 hours after the vaccine is given. The vaccine is made in eggs and is dead material. Very important to read this next statement carefully! YOU CANNOT CATCH THE FLU FROM THE FLU SHOT. Just cannot happen. Now, we are fortunate at Slocum Dickson in that our pharmacy allows us to order vaccine early. We put our order in each April just as they are beginning to start the process to make the millions of doses of vaccine each year. WE were also fortunate this year to receive our first shipment in the last week of August which allowed us to start giving shots the first part of September. This has been the earliest we have ever been able to start the process and we were assured that we would receive all vaccine ordered. We have been offering shots at all well appointments and doing special all day "FLU Clinics" by appointment. We were doing great and I have to thank all my nurses for doing a great job getting as many kids immunized as we could. Then the news came that further shipments of our order were going to be held by the government to allow room for Swine Flu production. We quickly ran out of vaccine. First the doses for the kids under 2 years old and then by October 9th all our doses were gone. I apologize to all of you who were scheduled for vaccine and to those of you who were planning to get the vaccine as you come in for well physicals. There is a silver lining here. Fortunately Seasonal Flu is not yet here in the Mohawk Valley and we do not expect it until later in the winter. And, we have been assured that we will get our remaining doses of vaccine that we originally ordered. Watch for announcements on the web site and at the office. We will do our best to get everyone a Seasonal Flu shot that wants one.

Now, let's go over H1N1 or Swine Flu. This strain of influenza came as a surprise this year seemingly coming out of nowhere. It is a "cousin" to regular flu and is

a strain of the influenza virus family. So why the fuss? Well, it is very contagious and spreads very easily from person to person. Early fears this year centered on the fact that it may be more deadly than regular flu a fact that has not been seen so far. H1N1 does seem to prefer younger people and can make them more ill. Our Federal Government stepped in and created a program to manufacture and distribute H1N1 vaccine but a late start on production has delayed finished product. You cannot rush the production of vaccine and H1N1 is made the same way as Seasonal Flu. Doses will be coming off production lines in middle October and will be shipped to hospitals and County Health Departments. Large groups like Slocum Dickson may get shipments directly but we are not sure yet. The recommendations about who should get the vaccine is a little different from Seasonal Flu. The list includes: Health Care workers, patients 6 months to 24 years of age, pregnant women, adults caring for young children less than 6 months old, and patients with underlying health concerns like asthma, heart disease, diabetes, kidney disease and cancer ages 25 - 65. Again, patients 6 months to just under 9 years old are recommended to get a booster a month later. Also a very important difference with this vaccine centers on a decision by NYS to give the vaccine to school aged children at school. We have not had a program like this in a number of years. I imagine parents will get an information paper and a form to sign for their child to get the vaccine at school. The school nurse will not be giving the shots a Oneida County will be using a company that gives vaccines to large groups. Many of the first doses will be nasal spray vaccine. This vaccine is a live vaccine but is engineered to only live in your nose while you get immunity and cannot make you ill. So, at your Pediatrician's Office we will be at first only giving vaccine to children 6 months to 4 years old. We have no idea how much vaccine will be available and how long it will take to get additional doses even after our first shipment. Many of you want to get this vaccine as soon as possible but we have to ask for patience. H1N1 virus is here in our area and people are already coming in with flu-like symptoms. We will have an organized approach to administer vaccine as soon as possible. Your Pediatricians recommend getting this vaccine. Again it is a dead vaccine and you cannot catch H1N1 from the shot. Stay tuned to this web site and information at the office.

A word about testing. There are some quick tests available for Seasonal Flu and we have been doing some to get an idea about what Flu activity is like in our office. There will be limited commercially available test kits for H1N1. We are told they are very expensive (hundreds of dollars per test) and insurance may not pay for it. The test is really not necessary. If your doctor diagnoses your child with the flu it doesn't really matter which strain you have. We are going to care for you based on your symptoms and needs and not based on the name of your bug. The flu is the flu and we will take all the steps needed to care for your child. Don't ask for a test about which flu you might have. We will not be equipped to perform it.

I encourage all of you to go to [Flu.gov](http://Flu.gov) a really great website that will tell you all you need to know about the illness, care, prevention and the vaccines. Remember this H1N1 Flu spreads easily. We will get through this and let's try to keep calm. Panic helps no one. Drink your fluids. And, WASH YOUR HANDS!