

HEALTH MATTERS

Officials Prepare for Long, Deadly Flu Season

H1N1 vaccine arrives for use in Oregon

BY JAKE THOMAS
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

In a conference call last week, Washington officials said they are bracing for a particularly nasty flu season that has been complicated by the presence of H1N1 virus.

Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius told reporters that her department was seeing as much flu activity this fall as during the height of the previous flu season.

The flu, sometimes referred to as "swine flu," is an especially dangerous strain of the virus that has killed 240 and hospitalized nearly 4,000 people since August.

Sebelius explained that there is a myth that minorities are at greater risk of catching the virus.

While this isn't true, people with asthma, heart disease, and diabetes are more likely to be significantly affected by the flu. All of these afflictions disproportionately affect African Americans.

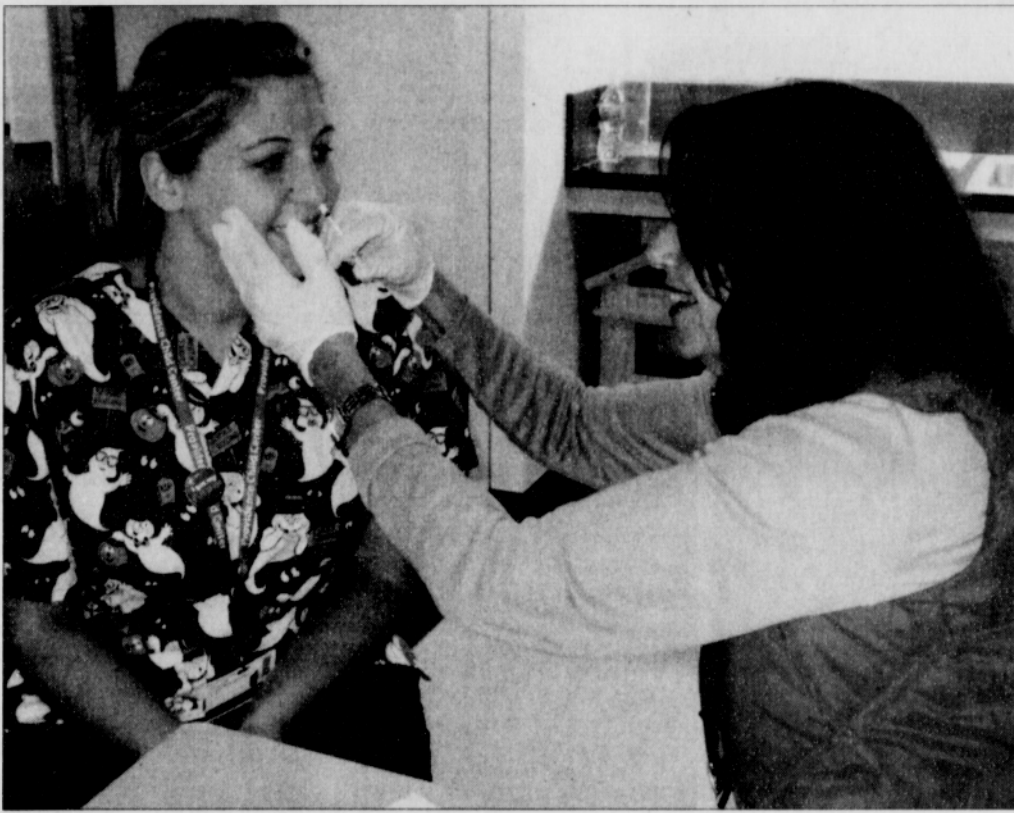
"It's a different kind of virus," said Sebelius, who expects the flu season, which officially began last week to be particularly long. She added that vulnerable people might want to get a vaccination against pneumonia as well, since contracting it in addition to H1N1 could be very serious.

According to the Sebelius the recently-approved vaccine is just now starting to trickle in across the country. For now, it's being given primarily to healthcare providers, pregnant women, childcare givers, and people who are likely to develop serious complications from existing illnesses.

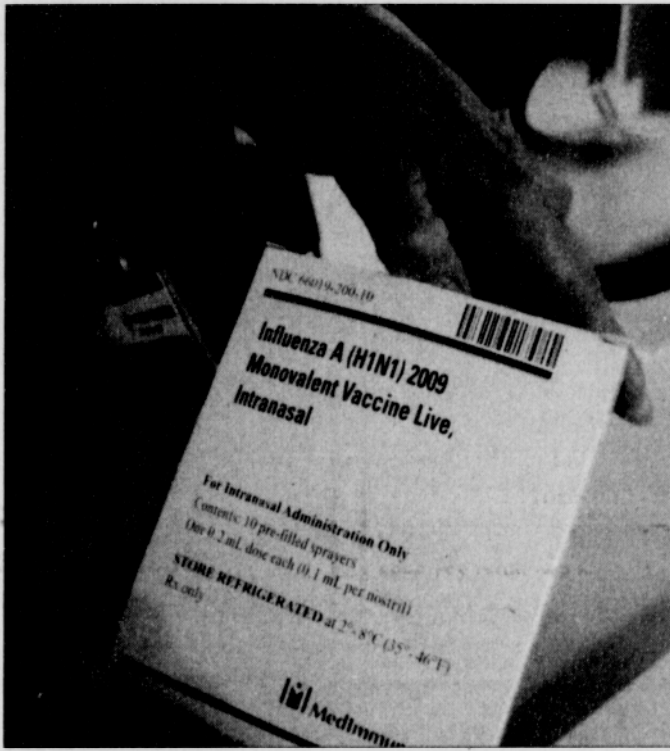
She stressed that no safety precautions were skipped over in manufacturing it, and none will be skipped over in distributing it. Everyone who wants the vaccine will have access to it, she added.

"There will be enough vaccine for everybody," she said. "The vaccination program is starting, but it's starting slowly."

Sebelius said that her department has partnered with various community and faith organizations across the country to distribute the vaccine, and it will be available at various commu-



A Providence health care worker receives the nasal mist form of the H1N1 vaccine.



The H1N1 vaccine arrived in Oregon and is being distributed to high-risk groups.

nity hubs, like schools and even box stores.

The government has purchased the vaccine and is not charging for it, she said. However, some distributors might charge an administration fee.

"We don't want finances to be a barrier for anyone being vaccinated," she said.

Anne Schuchat, Director of Center for Disease Control's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, said that the government has 250 million doses of the vaccine ready to go, and more in the pipe.

She also said that the virus was widespread in 27 states and 20 were seeing regional outbreaks.

"The H1N1 is just starting to come out in little dribs and drabs," she said.

Schuchat said that some people might come down with the virus and quickly recover, while others might have a tougher time. Regardless, prompt treatment with medicines like Tamiflu can help, she said.

In Oregon, the first shipments of the vaccine have just recently arrived, with the nasal mist form being distributed to healthcare workers and other priority groups.

Since April, 200 Oregonians have been hospitalized, and 15 have died.

Most Oregonians should be able to get the vaccine through their healthcare provider, and state and local health clinics will begin distributing the vaccine once more is available later this month.

Health Clinics to Offer Free Screenings

Two health free health clinics will be offered in the next two weeks that will give free and low-cost health screenings for the region's African American populations.

On Saturday, Oct. 17, from 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m., the African American Health Coalition will be offering a health clinic at the Blazers Boys and Girls Club at 5250 N.E. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard.

The clinic will include flu shots, dental screenings, vision and glaucoma checks, diabetes foot checks, and massage therapy.

The early detection of prostate cancer can save lives. African American males have a very high rate of prostate cancer. Identifying and treating it early improves the odds of surviving the malady.

The clinic will offer free prostate cancer screenings to

the first 100 African American males that pre-register by calling: 503-413-1850.

The clinic will also be offering screening of colorectal cancer, which claims the lives of many men and women in Oregon, and disproportionately affects African Americans.

The second event, offering similar healthcare services, is scheduled Saturday, Oct. 24 at the Community AME Zion

Church, 3605 East 13th St. in Vancouver.

Healthcare providers will offer free HIV testing, in addition to basic medical services for children and adults. There will be information on food assistance, Head Start, and the H1N1 virus.

Free massages and healthy snacks will be provided.

For more information on the Vancouver event, call 360-693-4566.

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The Pacific Northwest Jurisdiction 33rd Annual Holy Convocation of the Church of God in Christ United will convene Oct. 21st - 25th at headquarters Emanuel Church of God in Christ United 4800 NE 30th Ave.

Hosted by:

 Jurisdictional Prelate Artice Wright	 International Prelate James Feltus will be speaking on Thursday, Oct. 22
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Services begin nightly at 7:30PM and 3PM Sunday Oct. 25
Daily Seminars 11AM - 1PM

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