



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

News Release

LINDA LINGLE
GOVERNOR

CHIYOME LEINAALA FUKINO M.D., DIRECTOR
Phone: (808) 586-4410
Fax: (808) 586-4444

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HIGHEST RISK GROUPS PRIORITIZED FOR FLU VACCINE

HONOLULU - The Hawaii State Department of Health (DOH) in partnership with the medical community and major insurers have determined that Hawaii's highest priority for the distribution of publicly-held vaccine is our frail elderly confined to long-term care facilities.

"There is agreement among healthcare providers that our elderly confined in long-term care facilities are our greatest concern. They are the most vulnerable to complications from the flu and should be protected," said Health Director Chiyome Fukino, M.D.

The DOH met with representatives from HMSA, Kaiser Permanente, the Medical Corner, Longs Drugs, the Veteran Administration and the Department of Defense earlier this week to discuss a strategy for allocating Hawaii's limited supply of publicly-held vaccine. This is vaccine originally targeted for public clinics. Discussion is continuing on the most effective means of getting the vaccine to those at highest risk for complications from the flu.

"In the next few weeks we will have a better idea of the actual supply of vaccine in Hawaii. It's still early in the flu season and there is time to plan on how best to meet the needs of our most vulnerable. We must be sure to first protect the very old, the very young and those very sick," said Sarah Park, M.D., Disease Outbreak and Control Division.

Fortunately, many physicians in Hawaii have received their vaccine from Aventis and Hawaii is in a better situation than some other states such as California and New Mexico. These states ordered the majority of their vaccine from Chiron.

(more)

The DOH is strongly urging physicians and the public to follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations on who should receive flu vaccine. At this time, vaccine should only be administered to those vulnerable individuals in high-risk groups.

Individuals who fall into one of the high-risk groups should contact their health care provider to receive a flu shot or to be placed on a vaccination list. High-risk groups are:

- Children 6-23 months
- Adults 65 years and older
- Chronically ill
- Pregnant women

Health-care workers involved in direct patient care and healthy out-of-home caregivers and household contacts of children less than six months old, are encouraged to look at alternatives to the flu shot, specifically the nasal-spray flu vaccine (brand name FluMist).

While vaccination is the best protection against the flu, there are still other ways to protect yourself and your family:

- Avoiding close contact with people who are sick.
- Staying home when you are sick.
- Covering your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.
- Washing your hands frequently.
- Avoiding touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Touching something contaminated with germs (doorknob, phone or faucet) and then touching your eyes, nose, or mouth can spread infection.
- Seek care early. See your doctor immediately if you develop flu symptoms.

For additional information on flu and the availability of flu vaccine, call 2-1-1.

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For More Information Contact:
Laura M. Lott
Department of Health
Phone: (808) 586-4418
lmlott@mail.health.state.hi.us