



NIAGARA COUNTY
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HEALTH DEPT SETS H1N1 PUBLIC FORUM FOR SEPT. 28
DIALOG WITH PUBLIC, VACCINATION PLANS ON AGENDA

SANBORN—Niagara County's Health Department plans to engage the public on the H1N1 pandemic at a Sept. 28 meeting to be held at Niagara County Community College.

The meeting will be held in Room E140 of the college. Presentations and discussions begin at 7 p.m.

"We're going to hold a summit—a meeting for all of the Niagara County public to educate them about H1N1 progress, educate them on where we are, what they can do to help us, what they can do to protect themselves, their families, and their community," said Public Health Director Daniel Stapleton. "We'll have physicians who are experts in this area that will be there, a superintendent from a local school district will be there. It's really an opportunity for us to present the facts and the science behind the decisions we are making."

Stapleton said popular misconceptions, including differences between swine flu and the H1N1 virus, would be addressed. The most important aspect of the public meeting, however, will be refocusing the public's attention on basic steps they can take to protect themselves, Stapleton said.

"We're responsible to educate the public on public health issues, and there hasn't been a public health issue like this in many, many years," Stapleton said. "We're training, we're planning—and this is what we plan and train for, to respond to the public's needs. We want them to be confident that we're ready and prepared to protect them. That's why we exist."

Stapleton said the forum would address seven key points:

- The New Flu - What's it all about?
- Vaccines and who should get them
- How do we do it?
- What is a POD?
- Why schools?
- What discussions with planners and officials have taken place?
- How can parents and the community help?

Public Health Planning and Information Officer Elaine Roman, RN, will lead the public through a presentation covering those areas, before a panel discussion featuring physicians and school officials.

Also on hand will be Niagara County Legislature Chairman William L. Ross, C-Wheatfield, and County Manager Greg Lewis.

"We are going to share with the public information about our vaccination campaign," Roman said. "Who will the target groups be? Who are the people that are most at risk? We're going to talk about what the plan is in Niagara County. And we'll have a panel of doctors and school officials that will offer their perspectives about the vaccination plan and maybe allay some of the public's concerns."

Roman also noted that the meeting would look for public input.

"We're going to solicit suggestions from the community after the panel discussion," she said. "We're going to be honest with the community and tell them what our resources are and our step-by-step plan for using them to protect the community. And then we'll talk about how they can help us."

Legislator Danny Sklarski, D-Niagara, said the Health Department had put long hours into planning the public meeting following the success of a planning session that brought 130 public health officials, medical personnel, and first responders together late last month.

"The Health Department has been working round the clock to make sure the public is able to deal with this very real health concern," Sklarski said. "People need to know what steps the county's taking, and take the right steps, like washing their hands, that can protect them."

Sklarski and Stapleton also urged the public to continue with plans to receive annual flu shots from their healthcare providers, as inoculations against H1N1 would not protect the public from other flu strains.

"We want to stress over and over again that people make sure they get their seasonal flu shot from their provider," Stapleton said. "H1N1 vaccines will be a source of protection as well of course, but we want to make sure people get their seasonal flu shots as soon as possible. That's one thing they can do to protect themselves, their families, and the community."

Roman said the public forum would aim to engage the local population in important decisions about their own health and safety. She noted that public health officials were working to build community dialog before a significant outbreak of H1N1.

"The public needs to know that public health is more than just the Niagara County Department of Health, it's more than just the state Health Department," Roman said. "It's a partnership with physicians, hospitals, and most importantly the community members themselves, because if this outbreak should become more severe, then each individual is going to need to know what to do."

Doors open at 6:30 p.m. Refreshments will be served. For questions about the forum, please contact the Niagara County Department of Health at (716) 439-7439.

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