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**PRESS RELEASE: Update on H1N1 (Swine Component) Flu in
Niagara County**

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To date, New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) laboratories have confirmed thirty-six (36) cases of Novel H1N1 Influenza A in Niagara County. Four (4) of these cases have been confirmed since the beginning of the school year. The number of laboratory-confirmed cases represents only a small fraction of actual cases in the area, as testing is no longer routinely done. The majority of H1N1 infections diagnosed in Niagara County occurred in school-aged children. In the United States, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that the largest number of H1N1 cases overall, occurred in people five to twenty-four years of age. No children, and few adults under age sixty, have demonstrated any immunity to the H1N1 virus. Signs and Symptoms of H1N1 Swine Flu infection are similar to seasonal flu, with fever greater than 100°, headache, sore throat, body aches, and may also include nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. Antiviral medications can prevent infection or ease symptoms, but are not effective if given later than two days after the onset of influenza-like-illness (ILI) symptoms.

As stated in previous press releases, because H1N1 is now widespread in New York State, the CDC and NYSDOH released recommendations for testing, treatment and reporting on June 16, 2009. The guidelines discourage testing and treatment of mild cases of influenza-like-illness, except in individuals with underlying medical conditions, or in residential settings, such as group homes or nursing homes. Individuals with mild ILI should contact physicians by phone for evaluation, and should not report to physician offices unless instructed by their doctors. People with mild ILI or who have been exposed to ILI should NOT report to hospital emergency departments for testing. The vast majority of people will recover without any treatment, and testing will not influence treatment decisions. By following these guidelines, people can help to prevent the spread of H1N1 from mildly ill people to vulnerable high risk patients in doctors' offices and hospital emergency departments.

Overall, H1N1 illnesses in the US have been relatively mild. Most H1N1-infected individuals, who died from complications, had pre-existing medical conditions. The same groups that are at increased risk for complications from seasonal flu, are at increased risk for H1N1-related flu complications. Individuals in the high risk categories should not attend mass gatherings or functions where others could be ill with ILI. The CDC defines the H1N1 infectious period as one day before the onset of flu symptoms until seven days after. Therefore, adults and children with influenza-like-illness should stay home and away from others for no less than 24 hours after a fever ends without use of fever-reducing medication, and up to seven days after ILI begins if returning to an environment with high-risk individuals.

The Niagara County Department of Health has begun receiving small amounts of H1N1 vaccine in nasal and injectible forms. These initial doses will be used for the priority groups, and once those groups are completed, the vaccine will be provided to the general public. Those priority groups are:

- Individuals aged 6 months to 24 years
- Pregnant women
- Healthcare workers
- Individuals with compromised immune systems
- First Responders

In the meantime, people should take the following steps to reduce the risk of H1N1, as well as any other respiratory infection:

- Cover coughs and sneezes with a sleeve or disposable tissue. Dispose of tissues in a wastebasket and immediately cleanse the hands.
- Wash hands often and vigorously with soap and water for fifteen to twenty seconds, especially after coughing, sneezing or blowing the nose, before and after eating, after using the bathroom, and ALWAYS before touching or caring for infants, elderly or chronically ill. Use waterless alcohol-based hand sanitizer when hand-washing facilities are unavailable.
- Keep hands away from eyes, nose and mouth. Many respiratory infections are picked up by touching the eyes with fingers contaminated by viruses.
- In households, keep family toothbrushes separate and consider individually designated tubes of toothpaste to avoid cross-contamination from one family member to another.
- Stay home if sick with flu-like symptoms; keep ill children home from school or daycare.
- Avoid unnecessary contact with individuals who show signs of respiratory illness.
- Sports team members should not share drinking containers.

The New York State Department of Health has established a Novel H1N1 Hotline that can provide additional information to concerned individuals. Call **1-800- 808-1987**.

Additional H1N1 information can be found at the following websites:

www.health.state.ny.us/diseases/communicable/influenza/pandemic/index.htm

<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/> or www.niagaracounty.com