

Preparation for the 2009 H1N1 Flu Pandemic

September 3, 2009

Since my last update of August 21, 2009, Ohio's public health officials and medical personnel continue to prepare for the H1N1 influenza immunization of the at-risk populations that have been identified by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Currently, the at-risk populations are health care workers, pregnant women, all people from 6 months through 24 years of age, household contacts and caregivers for children younger than 6 months of age, and people aged 25 years through 64 years who have health conditions associated with higher risk of medical complications from influenza.

In the event that Governor Strickland declares an emergency that affects the public's health, the Ohio Administrative Code (OAC) 4765-6-03 will be triggered. If this occurs, the OAC 4765-6-03 expands the Ohio EMS scope of practice to permit the administration of immunizations by Ohio EMS providers provided that they are under physician medical direction and have received the appropriate training for administration of immunizations. During the EMS Board meeting on August 19, 2009, the EMS Board made the following recommendations in the event that OAC 4765-6-03 is enacted for the purpose of administration of the H1N1 immunizations:

1. Although OAC 4765-6-03 addresses the EMS scope of practice of all provider levels in the state of Ohio, the EMS Board recommends that participation in the administration of the H1N1 immunization to at-risk populations, prior to the actual local onset of a pandemic, be limited to EMT-Intermediates and EMT-Paramedics due to the extremely brief period of time available for training of personnel in the skill of intramuscular injections.
2. Ohio EMS providers participating in the administration of the H1N1 immunization of at-risk populations will complete the training as that is provided by the CDC.
3. The protocols for administration of the H1N1 immunizations by Ohio EMS providers will be provided and overseen by the local public health agencies.

In an effort to facilitate the training of Ohio EMS providers in the administration of the H1N1 immunization, the Ohio Department of Public Safety, Division of EMS is actively in the process of creating a training module that incorporates all of the appropriate training materials from the CDC. This training module, which consists of a Power Point presentation and a skills checklist, will be offered free-of-charge to all Ohio EMS providers and will meet the criteria of the EMS Board recommendation regarding training. As State Medical Director, I have approved this training module for continuing education hours provided that it is presented in compliance with OAC 4765-7-11, 4765-18-02, and 4765-19. Local physician medical directors of EMS providers participating in

the administration of the H1N1 immunizations retain the authority to require additional training of the EMS personnel whom they oversee.

As with any contagious disease, prevention is crucial. Education of the general public about the novel H1N1 virus, in addition to the medical community, is ongoing. Through various outlets of communication, the general public is being informed of the signs and symptoms of H1N1 influenza and of the preventative measures that can be taken to avoid becoming infected or infecting other individuals. I have been informed of several employers throughout our state who have relaxed their corporate absentee policies to encourage their workers with influenza-like symptoms to stay at home as recommended by the CDC and prevent the spread of the disease. Likewise, there are measures within the upcoming H1N1 immunization training module for Ohio's EMS providers that should be routine for prehospital care delivery. Specifically, the utilization of appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) and handwashing are mandatory actions that should be exercised with each and every patient encounter on a daily basis with or without the onset of a pandemic.

All Ohio EMS agencies will be notified immediately when our H1N1 immunization training module is available. On behalf of the Ohio Department of Public Safety, Division of EMS and the EMS Board, I will continue to communicate updated information regarding the H1N1 immunization initiative and its impact on Ohio EMS as it becomes available. I hope that all of you have a safe and pleasant Labor Day holiday weekend. Thank you for the dedicated and diligent service that you provide to the residents and visitors of Ohio.

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