

Monday, October 26, 2009

First public swine flu clinics are Saturday

Only the H1N1 mist will be available and only for certain groups.

BY COURTNEY PERKES

The Orange County Register

Orange County's first two swine flu clinics for the public will be held Saturday, but they will only offer the nasal spray and target limited high-priority groups.

The free clinics at Irvine Valley College and Santa Ana College will provide the FluMist vaccine to children ages 2 to 9 and adults who are younger than 49 and care for infants too young for the shot. All others are asked to wait to receive the vaccine from their private provider or future clinics, as the vaccine becomes more available.

On Monday, federal officials acknowledged public frustration over the short supplies and said the vaccine is being delivered as quickly as it comes off the production line. Statewide and in Orange County, the supply has been less than expected.

Late Friday, the county's Health Care Agency

received the first batch of shots. But the 19,200 shots cannot yet be given because they did not come with the necessary supplies to administer them. Dr. Nancy Bowen, chief medical officer for public health services for the county, said Monday the supplies should be delivered in a day or two. The shots will then be distributed to private providers for high-risk groups, including pregnant women.

With the rush to ship the vaccine, it's unclear precisely how many doses have arrived locally so far. The county's Health Agency has received 43,700 doses of the mist in addition to the 19,200 shots. But the state handles all the vaccine orders and most of the county's vaccine supply is being shipped directly to about 1,200 doctor's offices, hospitals and schools. Bowen said the county has requested that the state inform the agency when shipments go out to keep better track of availability.

On Monday morning, Dr. Eric Handler, the county's health officer and a pediatrician, helped school nurses give the nasal mist to students at San Marino Elementary in Buena Park. Last week, the nine-school Centralia Elementary School District began campus vaccination clinics.

"This does not hurt. I promise you," Handler told one apprehensive student, showing her the syringe. "I'm just going to squeeze this. Relax. Then we do one more."

So far about 1,500 Centralia students have been vaccinated. About 70 percent of parents gave permission. The county trained the school nurses and provided 1,000 of the doses to supplement the smaller shipment the district received.

The students missed about 15 minutes of class to stand in line and wait for the vaccine, which was kept cool in an ice chest in the corner of a

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classroom.

"Not bad at all as compared to being out of a school for a week," said Linda Crawford, a nurse practitioner with the district.

Sixth grader Milly Kim, 11, said she wanted the vaccine after learning about swine flu from the news and her family.

"I know that it's dangerous," she said. "Once you get it, it's hard to get out of it."

In Orange County, 22 people have died from H1N1 complications, including four children and two pregnant women.

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