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DATE: September 10, 2009
TO: News Media
FROM: Jennie Miller
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SUBJECT: Seasonal flu vs. Swine flu

Fall is once again upon us, and this year the presence of the H1N1 influenza, otherwise known as the "swine flu," has increased interest in the coming flu season. It is important to distinguish between seasonal flu and H1N1 flu. Although the resulting illnesses are similar, separate vaccines are necessary to help prevent each illness. Additionally, the target population groups are different for the seasonal flu and the H1N1 flu.

Seasonal flu is caused by a variety of influenza viruses which mutate from year to year. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) uses data from around the world to predict the specific viral strains that will be significant threats in each flu season. This prediction must be made by the previous spring so that a vaccine can be developed and tested before the flu season arrives. While anyone would benefit from receiving the seasonal flu vaccination, CDC recommends vaccination for the following people:

- Children aged 6 months up to their 19th birthday
- Pregnant women
- People 50 years of age and older
- People of any age with certain chronic medical conditions
- People who live in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities

- People who live with or care for those at high risk for complications from flu, including health care workers and caregivers of children less than 6 months of age

Unlike the seasonal flu, the H1N1 flu virus has just appeared on the world scene. Because this virus is genetically different than seasonal flu viruses, the H1N1 flu vaccine is different than the seasonal flu vaccine. This means the seasonal flu vaccine does not protect against H1N1 and vice versa. As experts have studied the characteristics of illness caused by the H1N1 flu virus, they have identified a significant difference in the population groups susceptible to the H1N1 virus as opposed to those persons affected by the seasonal flu virus. While the seasonal flu can typically cause severe illness in our older population, very few senior citizens 65 years and older have become ill from the H1N1 flu virus. Experts believe they were probably exposed to a similar viral strain in their youth and thus have some immunity. Therefore, CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices recommends that when H1N1 vaccine is first available, vaccination efforts should focus on the following five target groups:

- Pregnant women
- People who live with or care for children younger than 6 months of age
- Health care and emergency medical services personnel with direct patient contact
- Persons between the ages of 6 months through 24 years of age
- People from ages 25-64 years who have medical conditions that put them at higher risk for influenza related complications

The first supply of H1N1 vaccine is estimated to arrive at local health departments in mid-October with subsequent shipments to follow. Public Health, Delta & Menominee Counties has a step-by-step plan to distribute the vaccine, starting with the most susceptible population groups and expanding the distribution as more vaccine is delivered. Citizens of Delta and Menominee counties are reminded to take the usual hygiene precautions to prevent catching and spreading any type of flu: wash hands frequently, cover your mouth when coughing or sneezing, and stay home when sick. Information about the H1N1 flu virus, scheduled flu clinics, and other hygiene tips can be found on Public Health's website www.phdm.org.