

NEW MEXICO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
Secretary Designee Catherine Torres, MD

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Dept. of Health Data Helped Lead to Change in National Flu Recommendations
Investigation Included Data on Death Rates of American Indians

(Las Cruces) – The New Mexico Department of Health’s data from the 2009 H1N1 flu pandemic showed a disproportionate number of deaths among American Indian and Alaska Natives that helped lead to changes in the national recommendations of high risk populations that should be vaccinated against the flu, according to a recent report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

All American Indian and Alaska Natives are now considered a high risk group for flu complications and are advised to get a flu shot every year and receive antiviral treatment should they develop influenza. According to the CDC’s Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report for the week of Dec. 11, 2010, the reasons for the disparity in death and hospitalization rates are not completely known, however a high prevalence of chronic health conditions such as diabetes and asthma, poverty rates and access to healthcare could be contributing factors. Eleven other states also contributed data to the investigation.

“The change in the national recommendations is an important step in protecting more people from the flu,” said Dr. Catherine Torres, secretary designee of the Department of Health. “Flu activity is rising in several areas of the state and I want to remind all New Mexicans that it is not too late to get vaccinated against the flu. Getting a flu shot is the best protection available to protect yourself and your family from the disease.”

Dr. Torres said to avoid catching the flu or passing it on to others, people should also frequently wash their hands, cover their mouth and nose when sneezing and coughing and stay home when ill.

While everyone should get a flu vaccine, it's especially important that people in the following groups get vaccinated, either because they are at high risk of having serious flu-related complications or because they live with or care for people at high risk for developing flu-related complications:

- Pregnant women (any trimester)
- Children younger than 5, but especially children younger than 2 years old
- People age 65 and older
- People of any age with certain chronic medical conditions like asthma, diabetes, and lung or heart disease

- 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 babies younger than 6 months
- American Indians and Alaskan Natives
- People who are morbidly obese

New Mexicans should contact their health care providers to receive flu vaccine. The Department's public health offices provide vaccine to people who are at high risk for serious illness or death and people who have no health insurance. Public health offices are listed in the phonebook's blue pages under state government. Contact information for public health offices is listed at www.nmhealth.org.

As the flu season progresses, you can find information about the flu and flu clinics by calling toll-free at 866-681-5872 or looking up the Department of Health's website, <http://www.immunizenm.org/flu.shtml>.

Many of the people at high risk for flu complications should also get a pneumonia shot if they have never had one. People who need to have the pneumococcal vaccine are: age 65 and older, and adults 19 and older who smoke, or have chronic health conditions, such as asthma, diabetes, cardiovascular or lung disease, cirrhosis, chronic renal failure or are immunocompromised due to lymphoma, organ transplant, multiple myeloma or Hodgkin disease.

To read the full CDC report, go online to <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5848a1.htm>

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