

ANDREW J. SPANO, Westchester County Executive  
Donna Greene and Victoria Hochman, Directors of Communications

**CONTACT: DONNA GREENE**  
**CAREN HALBFINGER (Health)**

**(914) 995-2935**  
**(914) 813-5013**

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**SWINE FLU: WESTCHESTER GEARS UP JUST IN CASE**  
**Spano, health and emergency services commissioners detail comprehensive effort and**  
**remind residents to get “regular” flu shot now**

While confirmed cases of the novel H1N1 (swine) flu were relatively few in Westchester this summer, county officials have put in place a comprehensive plan to cope with a flu epidemic – small or large – that may develop this fall and winter, County Executive Andy Spano announced today.

“We are as prepared as we can be,” Spano said at a news conference where he was joined by Commissioner of Emergency Services Anthony Sutton and Commissioner of Health Joshua Lipsman. “Our plan involves hospitals, health providers, emergency workers, local governments, schools, businesses, public information – and most of all the public itself.”

Specifics range from updating Web sites to help with ambulance diversion in the event a hospital ER is overcrowded; hotlines to connect hospitals to each other and to the Department of Emergency Services so that any medical facility can get quick assistance; collaboration with the Westchester Medical Center to monitor patient census; and monitoring supplies and medical staff, including emergency medical workers, that could be needed in the event of an epidemic.

The county has received a portion of supplies from the Strategic National Stockpile, containing anti-virals and masks and has activated its plan to secure additional deliveries should they be needed. Westchester has placed orders for non-perishable supplies.

While all suspected cases of H1N1 will not be sent to a lab for testing, the county Department of Labs and Research is prepared with its sophisticated equipment to take samples as needed to stay on top of any epidemic.

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The outreach also includes conference calls as needed with businesses, school representatives and community leaders stressing the need to encourage sick employees and students to stay home until 24 hours after fever symptoms have disappeared and to let employees work from home if their children are sick.

This is supplemented by the county's ongoing public information effort, including special sections on its Web site ([www.westchestergov.com/health](http://www.westchestergov.com/health)) to address issues of health providers and school administrators; bus card campaign and other measures will advocate good personal hygiene to prevent the spread of germs; and the Health Department's information phone lines (813-5000) to answer questions from the public about flu and vaccinations, supplemented if need be by United Way's 2-1-1.

Spano added: "Most people who have had H1N1 flu have recovered within a week on their own with no need for medication or to even see their doctors. We remain hopeful that we will not get a severe epidemic, particularly as people take preventive measures. But our effort must – and does – focus on making sure our residents get the medical services and help they need if there is a serious outbreak."

Said Sutton, "Westchester has been planning for the return of the H1N1 flu this fall since it first surfaced in the county this past spring. At that time, County Executive Spano set up a special task force under the direction of my department that included subcommittees addressing topics such as public information, flu monitoring, laboratory procedures, vaccination efforts, hospital surge capacity and other specialty areas."

"Westchester County had 130 documented cases of novel H1N1 flu last spring and this summer, most of these cases very mild," said Dr. Lipsman. "The first wave of vaccine for this flu should begin to arrive in Westchester in mid-October and will be first available to people considered most at risk. In the meantime I urge residents, particularly those who are pregnant or age 50 and over to schedule their regular flu shots now. Parents with children ages 6 months to 18 years old who have not already had their children vaccinated should do so, too. Getting the novel H1N1 flu shot will not protect you from regular flu, and more people become ill or die from regular flu each year than have so far from novel H1N1 flu."

Lipsman noted that people who think they have either mild cases of seasonal or H1N1 flu should stay home and rest and call their doctors with concerns rather than overwhelming hospitals and medical practices.

Revised guidelines put in place by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention last spring call for anyone with fever and a cough or sore throat to stay home for at least 24 hours after the fever subsides to avoid infecting others. Cases of mild H1N1 flu are not expected to result in school dismissals unless so many students and staff are absent that classes cannot continue effectively.

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Each year, 36,000 Americans die from regular flu and more than 200,000 people are hospitalized. By comparison, at the end of August, 556 died in the U.S. and 8,843 people were hospitalized with novel H1N1 flu

### **FLU VACCINES DISTRIBUTION**

Beginning in mid-October, H1N1 flu vaccine is expected to begin arriving in the offices of physicians, clinics and hospitals who have signed up with New York State to receive supplies. The county is urging all obstetricians, pediatricians and other primary care providers in Westchester to register with the state to receive novel H1N1 flu vaccine to give to their patients.

To register, providers should go to <https://hcsteamwork1.health.state.ny.us/pub>.

Both preservative-free single doses and multi-dose vials with preservative will be available. It is likely that residents will need two doses of the vaccine for it to be fully effective.

The vaccine will be given first to the groups that are thought by the federal CDC to be most at-risk of complications. They are: pregnant women, people caring for or living with an infant younger than six months old, health care and emergency workers, people six months – 24 years old; people 25-64 with health conditions associated with higher risk of medical complications from influenza. If there is not enough vaccine at the outset, these groups will be further limited, based on national guidelines.

While the vaccine will be provided free by the state to health care providers who sign up with the campaign, providers can charge patients for administering the vaccine and for an office visit.

Dr. Lipsman said, “We also are recommending people ask their doctors whether they should get pneumonia shots at the same time, as pneumonia can be a deadly complication of the flu”

Residents with questions about whether the regular flu shot or H1N1 flu shot is right for them should speak with their medical providers.

“People who get the flu, whether novel H1N1 flu or regular flu, usually don’t need medical attention but should stay at home and rest,” Dr. Lipsman said. “Unless you are so sick that you must be hospitalized, there is no need to be tested for novel H1N1 flu. Residents who have already had novel H1N1 flu also have developed natural immunity to it.”

Anyone who does develop flu symptoms is urged to stay home until 24 hours after a fever resolves to avoid infecting others. Cases of mild novel H1N1 flu are not expected to result in school dismissals.

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The symptoms of novel H1N1 flu in people are similar to the symptoms of regular human flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people infected with novel H1N1 flu have also reported diarrhea and vomiting. Like regular flu, novel H1N1 flu can vary in severity from mild to severe, and may worsen underlying chronic medical conditions.

### **PREVENTION MEASURES**

“I can’t stress enough how important hand washing is in preventing the spread of illness,” Dr. Lipsman said. “Frequent hand washing with soap and warm water is the single, best thing that we can all do keep germs from spreading. In addition, if you have flu symptoms, it’s important that you stay home from school or work so as not to spread illness to others. If you do get severely ill, seek medical attention.”

The CDC has determined that the H1N1 flu virus spreads from person to person and is thought to occur in the same way as seasonal flu – mainly through coughing or sneezing by infected people. To help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like flu:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it. If you cannot use a tissue, cough into your sleeve rather than your hands.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- If you get sick with influenza, stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

“No one in Westchester should panic about the swine flu,” said Spano. “While we don’t know how severe this swine flu season will be, so far reports from the southern hemisphere – where winter is already almost ended – are encouraging. Cases there have been generally mild, just as our cases were last spring.”