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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**WESTCHESTER COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH OFFERS FINAL
LOW-COST FLU CLINIC THIS SEASON ON FEBRUARY 28**

The Westchester County Department of Health will be holding its final low-cost public flu clinic this season for Westchester County residents and employees on Wednesday, February 28th, 4:00 p.m. – 6:30 p.m., at 85 Court Street in White Plains. Flu shots are particularly important for people who are 50 years of age and older. Flu shots are covered in full by Medicare; otherwise there is a \$10.00 fee. Pneumococcal vaccines are also being offered to those 65 years of age and older. Pneumococcal vaccines are also covered in full by Medicare; otherwise there is a \$20.00 fee. To schedule an appointment, residents should contact the Health Department at (914) 637-4955 or (914) 637-4985.

"It's not too late for residents to get their annual flu shot," stated Joshua Lipsman, M.D., M.P.H., Commissioner of Health for Westchester County. "In particular, all senior citizens, and others who may be at high risk of becoming seriously ill if they get the flu, should protect themselves against this season's influenza by receiving a flu shot. Those receiving a flu shot should also use the opportunity to receive the pneumococcal vaccine, which usually needs to be given only once in a person's lifetime," added Dr. Lipsman.

The strain of influenza circulating and causing illness changes each year and therefore annual vaccination to protect against the current circulating strain is recommended. This year's influenza vaccine is aimed at combating three different strains of influenza: A/Moscow/10/99 (H3N2)-like strain; A/New Caledonia/20/99 (H1N1)-like strain; and B/Beijing/184/93-like strain. The influenza season generally occurs between October and April of each year. The flu vaccine takes 1-2 weeks to take effect and will offer protection throughout the entire season.

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All senior citizens, people with heart and/or lung conditions who are at increased risk themselves for becoming more seriously ill from influenza, or people who have significant contact with such people should protect themselves against influenza. Influenza can have much more serious consequences than other viruses prevalent in fall and winter.

Pneumococcal disease is spread by airborne or direct exposure to respiratory droplets of an infected person. The pneumococcus bacteria commonly causes serious pneumonia in older adults and can also lead to meningitis and a blood stream infection. Antibiotic resistant strains have developed. The vaccine usually needs to be administered only once in a person's lifetime, and it protects against strains of pneumococcal bacteria that cause serious disease. Potential side effects of the vaccine, which can include a low-grade fever and local soreness, are minor and subside quickly.

The Health Department's immunization program is geared toward protecting individuals at "high-risk" for becoming seriously ill with influenza and preventing the transmission of influenza to such individuals. "High-risk" individuals who should receive influenza vaccine include anyone over 65 years old; those with chronic diseases, such as heart or lung diseases, or diabetes, or compromised immune systems, regardless of age. People who are otherwise healthy but who may transmit influenza to such people should also be vaccinated. This includes healthcare workers both in institutional and home care settings, and people living in the same household as individuals at high risk for serious illness with influenza. In addition, any person who wishes to reduce the likelihood of becoming ill with influenza is encouraged to receive the vaccine.

Dr. Lipsman noted that some groups should consult their private physician before getting any flu vaccinations. These include people who:

- are allergic to eggs
- have a history of serious allergic condition or reaction to flu vaccine in the past (fever, rash, etc.);
- have had previous attacks of Guillain-Barre Syndrome, a neurological illness following viral infections or other chronic neurological illnesses;
- are pregnant (it is currently recommended that women in their second and third trimesters get a flu shot);
- have an acute febrile illness.

For more information about influenza, or flu clinic dates and sites, residents can call the Westchester County Department of Health at (914) 637-4700.

