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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FLU SHOTS TO BE PRIORITIZED FOR HIGH-RISK PEOPLE

Westchester County Department of Health scheduling an additional clinic for high-risk people

Due to increased public demand for the flu vaccine, the Westchester County Department of Health in accordance with state and federal guidelines, recommends that high-risk individuals be given priority status for flu vaccine at this time.

“To date in Westchester, we do not have a flu outbreak,” stated Dr. Joshua Lipsman, Commissioner of Health. “However, due to the sudden surge in demand, in part created by reports in the media, we are prioritizing our supply of flu vaccine to those at highest-risk. We strongly recommend that clinicians adhere to state and federal guidelines for prioritization of flu vaccines at their offices at this time.”

‘High-risk’ individuals who should receive influenza vaccine include anyone over 65 years of age, children aged 6-23 months, and those persons two years old or older with chronic diseases, such as heart or lung diseases, diabetes, asthma, or compromised immune systems. Pregnant women who are in their second or third trimester are also considered high-risk. A complete list of high-risk categories of individuals who should be given flu shots as a priority is available on the Health Department’s website at www.westchestergov.com/health.

Children over the age of two are not considered to be in the highest-risk group. Healthy individuals between the ages of five and 49 who are interested in protecting themselves against the flu are encouraged to ask their healthcare providers for the FluMist (nasal spray) Vaccine, for which there is not thought to be a shortage at this time.

MORE

The Westchester County Department of Health will hold an additional flu clinic for high-risk individuals over 18 years of age on Tuesday, December 30, 2003 in White Plains from 9:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. Appointments are necessary. The Department estimates it can vaccinate as many as 500 people at the December 30th clinic, using all the Department's currently on-hand vaccine stock. For those covered by Medicare, the flu shots are free; otherwise there is a \$12 fee for the flu shot. For information on how to schedule an appointment, residents should call the Health Department's Flu Line at (914) 813-5596.

The Westchester County Department of Health does not administer flu vaccine to children. The Westchester County Department of Health had a limited supply of pediatric flu vaccine that has been distributed to area pediatricians on an as needed basis. There is no additional pediatric vaccine available from the Health Department at this time.

The Health Department continues to work with state health officials to secure additional vaccine for both pediatric and adult patients.

Influenza is a highly contagious disease that infects 10 to 20 percent of the population in the United States each year. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, an average of 36,000 people die from influenza complications, with another 114,000 being hospitalized, each year. Most deaths are among those over 65 years of age, the very young, or those with other serious health conditions. Most deaths and many influenza illnesses are full preventable through vaccination.

However, some groups should consult their private physicians 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 on influenza and flu-shot clinics, call the Westchester County Department of Health's Flu Line at (914) 813-5596, or visit its website at www.westchestergov.com/health.