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Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

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Health officials distribute flu vaccine statewide

More than 90,000 doses sent to public and private health-care providers

(Anchorage, AK) — It is again the season to get a flu shot. The Alaska Department of Health and Social Services began distributing more than 90,000 doses of flu vaccine to clinics across the state mid-September. Most public and private health-care providers have now received the state-supplied vaccine and are ready to give immunizations. Gerri Yett, the state's deputy immunization program manager, encourages Alaskans to contact their medical providers to be sure they have the state-supplied flu shots available.

Alaskans can receive flu shots now, but it's not too late to get the vaccine throughout the winter. During past years, the flu season has peaked in January, February or later. Once a person gets a flu shot, it takes about two weeks for that person's body to develop immunity against influenza viruses represented in the current season's vaccine.

With just one shot, most adults and children can receive protection against flu viruses that cause illness in thousands of people nationwide every year. Influenza can cause high fever, headache and body aches, extreme fatigue, cough, sore throat, and a runny or congested nose for a week, if not longer. Sometimes the symptoms can lead to a more serious illness, or aggravate an existing health condition.

"For high-risk individuals, influenza can be a devastating illness," Yett said. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 36,000 people in the United States die every year from flu complications.

State-supplied flu vaccine is available to Alaska residents wanting to reduce their risk of getting influenza. State and federal health officials, however, are encouraging Alaskans to get the vaccine if they are at greater risk for complications from the virus, or if they have close contact with others at risk.

— more —

High-risk groups include the following people:

- children 6 months through 4 years old;
- adults 50 years or older;
- children and adolescents on long-term aspirin therapy;
- women who are pregnant or could become pregnant during the flu season;
- people with compromised immunities or chronic health problems, including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, HIV infection, and conditions that make breathing difficult, such as asthma;
- residents of nursing homes or chronic care facilities;
- health-care workers; and
- anyone who has regular contact with ill people, children 5 years or younger, or adults 50 years or older. Flu vaccines are strongly encouraged for anyone who has contact with babies 6 months or younger.

For more information, visit <http://www.epi.hss.state.ak.us/>, or call the Alaska Immunization Hotline at 1-888-430-4321 or contact your health care provider.

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