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## Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

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### **Alaska reports nation's highest rate of seasonal flu vaccination among seniors** *High vaccination rate essential to prevent and stop the spread of influenza*

(Anchorage, AK) — The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has released a report showing that from August 2009 through January 2010, Alaska led the nation with the highest rate of seasonal influenza vaccination coverage among residents age 65 and older. An estimated 82 percent of Alaskans age 65 and older had received the seasonal flu vaccine by the end of January 2010, according to the CDC.

“We are thrilled to see that, for the first time, Alaska is leading the nation in achieving this high level of influenza immunization coverage among our older citizens,” said Laurel Wood, manager of the state’s immunization program. “This was more than a 12-percent increase in our coverage estimates for this population during the 2008–09 season, resulting in a greater level of protection among a population that is particularly vulnerable to developing complications from this infection.”

Wood noted that this achievement is particularly impressive given this year’s periodic shortages of seasonal influenza vaccine and the complex messages for seniors resulting from the introduction of a second influenza vaccine for H1N1. “We recognize that this achievement would not have been possible without the combined efforts of all facets of Alaska’s health care community, including our public health centers, tribal health corporations, physicians’ offices and clinics, pharmacies, community health centers and other partnering groups that worked so hard this year to provide influenza vaccine for our seniors.”

While Alaska celebrated the success of having such a high rate of influenza vaccination among seniors, Wood emphasized that it is still critical to promote and increase influenza vaccination among Alaskans of all ages. Beginning in 2010–11, all persons of all ages will be recommended to receive an influenza immunization. Of course, emphasis will continue to be placed on immunization of persons at higher risk of developing influenza-related complications or transmitting the disease to others.

The Department of Health and Social Services expects to receive its annual shipment of seasonal flu vaccines early fall of 2010, and many private providers also will have vaccine available at that time. Next fall’s seasonal vaccine will include protection against H1N1, so adults who get vaccinated against influenza will need only one shot for protection instead of the two different shots — one seasonal influenza and one H1N1 — that were recommended during the current season.

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