



**FOR RELEASE:** July 31, 2009

## **Muskegon County Prepares for Return of H1N1 Flu**

Muskegon, MI – While many aspects of the return of the H1N1 flu this fall are unknown, one thing is for sure...Muskegon County has been preparing. Public Health – Muskegon County has partnered with many health and human service agencies in the County to establish the Muskegon County H1N1 Response Unified Command. Unified Command is a way of organizing a response to an emergency when it calls for action from a variety of agencies.

Through this Unified Command, Public Health – Muskegon County has been working closely with Mercy Health Partners, the Muskegon County Medical Control Authority, fire and rescue professionals, law enforcement and many others. The group works together to determine the overall objectives, plan jointly for response activities and maximize the use of resources.

Why is this important? Right now, a new H1N1 virus is causing a pandemic flu. A pandemic flu is a worldwide outbreak of illness caused by a new flu virus. Because it is a new kind of flu, no one has protection against it. A new vaccine is in production, but may not be readily available to all until after the flu season is underway. Many more people than usual may be sick with the flu this fall and winter.

This group is working together to:

- Provide for the health and safety of our everyone in Muskegon County;
- Monitor flu activity and follow-up on reports of illness in Muskegon County;
- Coordinate the receipt and distribution of medicines, vaccines and supplies;
- Prepare healthcare facilities for a higher than usual amount of flu hospitalizations;
- Plan for a mass vaccination effort; and
- Share educational information about H1N1 flu.

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While there is no way to predict how severe this new flu will become, it's safe to say that most everyone will feel its impact. Even those who do not become ill themselves may have to care for someone who becomes ill, change child care arrangements if a school or daycare closes due to illness, or deal with higher than normal absenteeism in the workplace.

While Public Health is working with its partners to prepare Muskegon County for what could be the worst flu season in decades, here's what you can do to prepare at home:

- Talk with family members and loved ones about how they would be cared for if they got sick, or what will be needed to care for them in your home.
- Keep prescriptions filled and have medicines like pain relievers, cough and cold medicines, and stomach remedies on hand.
- Sign up now to volunteer with local groups to prepare and assist with the flu response.

And, don't forget to take these everyday steps to protect your health.

- Cover your mouth with a tissue or your sleeve when you cough or sneeze.
- Wash your hands with soap and warm water often. Use a hand sanitizer if soap and water aren't available.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.

To learn more about the H1N1 flu, visit [www.muskegonhealth.net](http://www.muskegonhealth.net) or call 2-1-1.

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