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MEDIA NOTE: A public information officer will be on call Saturday, Nov. 21. Call 941-806-8452 to schedule Saturday interviews.

Free H1N1 flu vaccinations available to people in CDC risk groups

The Sarasota County Health Department will offer free H1N1 flu vaccinations on Saturday, Nov. 21, to groups of people who are at risk under the guidelines of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The groups include:

- pregnant women
- children and young adults from six months old to age 24
- healthcare providers
- parents/caregivers of infants under six months of age
- people who are 25-64 years old and living with chronic health problems such as asthma, heart conditions or cancer

The free vaccinations will be available from 9 a.m.-2 p.m. Saturday at the following locations.

- **Sarasota County Health Department, 2200 Ringling Blvd., Sarasota**
- **George Mullen Activity Center, 4756 City Center Blvd., North Port**

Health officials are eager to immunize people in these high-risk groups as soon as possible. There will be enough vaccine to accommodate up to 1,000 people at each location on Saturday. Both the H1N1 nasal mist, which is preservative-free, and an injectable vaccine will be available. More than 21,000 doses of vaccine have been sent to healthcare providers for their patients who are in the CDC priority groups since these individuals are among those at highest risk for the H1N1 virus and its complications. The two county vaccine clinics are an option for those in the CDC priority groups who did not get the vaccine through their doctor, work site or school.

Similar to the seasonal influenza vaccine, the H1N1 vaccine provides protection to most people in eight to 10 days. Those who receive the seasonal FluMist® nasal spray vaccine should wait at least 28 days before receiving the H1N1 FluMist® nasal spray vaccine.

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PAGE TWO – Free H1N1 flu vaccinations available to people in CDC risk groups

In addition to getting vaccinated, Health Department officials recommend the following actions to help reduce the spread of H1N1 (swine) flu:

1. Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or the inside of your elbow.
2. Wash hands often with soap and water or alcohol-based hand gel, especially after coughing and sneezing. Visit www.cleanhandscampaign.org for more information.
3. Do not touch eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
4. Avoid contact with those who are coughing or otherwise appear to be ill.

Health officials anticipate being able to vaccinate the general population through walk-in and drive-through clinics sometime after the Thanksgiving holiday. The dates will be announced once there is sufficient vaccine available. Information on H1N1 vaccine availability for the general population will be available on the Web site, www.sarasotahealth.org. Those who do not have access to a computer can visit the health kiosks at local libraries across the county. Residents also can call the Flu Information Line, 941-861-2800, or the Sarasota County Call Center at 941-861-5000 after Thanksgiving. The Sarasota County Call Center has a TDD line, 941-861-1833, available for those who are hearing-impaired. Residents also can call the Florida Flu Information Line for general questions about H1N1. That toll-free number is 877-352-3581.

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