



Department of Health  
Agency of Human Services



## EMT Nurse Champions Vaccination for Vermont First Responders

Mark National Influenza Vaccination Week (Jan. 10-16)  
with the H1N1 Flu Shot or Nasal Spray

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COLCHESTER – Kate Soons, one of a small number of Vermont emergency medical technicians who are also registered nurses, refers to her commitment to the state’s mass vaccination campaign against H1N1 influenza as “a bug that I cannot shake.”

Soons works three 12-hour shifts a week at the Fletcher Allen Health Care Intensive Care Unit (ICU), volunteers as an EMT with Colchester Rescue, and also serves as an instructor at the University of Vermont. At the start of the H1N1 influenza outbreak this spring, she remembers being surprised by the young age of critically ill patients in the ICU.

“We have seen some very sick pediatric and OB (obstetrics) patients with this H1N1 outbreak,” Soons said. “When you see that – it kind of gives you pause.”

The Vermont Department of Health is promoting H1N1 vaccination for everyone older than 6 months during National Influenza Vaccination Week (January 10-16) – and recognizing those individuals who have strengthened the state’s efforts to protect as many people as possible during the H1N1 flu outbreak.

Soons was among the first EMTs in the state to get vaccinated. As the Emergency Medical Services District #3 board chair, she was intensely involved with promoting vaccination for EMS personnel. The EMS districts held monthly board meetings, and stayed in regular contact through e-mails. Vaccine was slow to arrive in great quantities, so her EMS district prioritized vaccination for those people at highest risk for exposure, and those responding to the highest volume of calls.

“It is our responsibility to protect the public, ourselves and our families,” Soons said. “We could go out on a call, pick someone up and bring the virus home. There was a lot of misinformation out there about the vaccine and some pushback on the nasal form, but I reiterated over and over again – it is safe and it is effective.”

The primary reason Soons chose to volunteer as an EMT is the commitment she felt to her community.

“The person who shows up at the door of my neighbor – or at my door – in an emergency, that matters to me,” Soons said. “I have a review session tonight at my home for EMT trainees, a dinner with 20 people. I make the time to do it. I totally groove on it.”

H1N vaccine is now widely available in plentiful quantities with many health care providers and at many sites around the state. The Vermont Department of Health is encouraging anyone 6 months and older who has not yet been vaccinated to do so now.

To locate a public clinic, go to the Health Department’s website at [www.healthvermont.gov](http://www.healthvermont.gov), then select “**Get Vaccinated**” at the top of the home page.

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