



Department of Health
Agency of Human Services



Porter Hospital Staff Protects Patients and Each Other Against the Flu

Vermont Department of Health Observes National Influenza Vaccination Week Dec. 5-11 – Urges everyone 6 months and older to get vaccinated!

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MIDDLEBURY – Ninety percent of the staff at **Porter Medical Center**, a 45-bed community hospital in Middlebury, were vaccinated against H1N1 influenza last year.

Like hospitals across the state, leaders at Porter made a concerted effort to vaccinate healthcare and support staff, to keep them working and caring for patients, and to protect patients who are especially vulnerable to infection.

The hospital's success was credited to strong working relationships among nursing staff, medical staff, and the pharmacy – a collaboration that will serve the hospital and the community well this flu season and for many years to come.

Pharmacy Director Sal Morana and his staff distributed 5,950 doses of H1N1 flu vaccine during a four-month period to hospital employees and nine hospital-owned practices last flu season. Mary Jean Rajda, an infection control nurse, gave 908 of the shots to hospital staff herself.

"We did what we had to do," Rajda said. "Sal got the vaccines, Pat Jannene, our vice president of clinical services said 'Go for it,' and then I administered the vaccine to the staff as efficiently as possible."

This flu season has been calm, without delays in vaccine distribution, and with a plentiful supply, Rajda said. This is the complete opposite of last year, Morana said.

Last year, there was a limited supply of vaccine at first, and provider offices and caregivers were pleading with the pharmacy for any available doses. The phone rang non-stop. Extra staff was brought in to handle the call volume. As vaccine arrived at the pharmacy it was immediately distributed, and there was never a time the vaccine stayed at the hospital more than a day or two.

"One of the challenges was determining who would be the first to get the vaccine," Morana said. "Physicians are tremendous advocates for their patients, and my staff was on the phone the moment they could tell them when they could expect vaccine."

The key to their success, Morana said, was that a large group of physician practices spread all across Addison County agreed to centralize distribution through the Porter Medical Center pharmacy. The practices were relieved, he said, because they knew they could focus on their patients, without worrying about ordering and documentation.

"I am really proud of the people I worked with last year," Rajda said. "I wasn't really surprised by how Porter responded. I love Porter. Everyone I worked with did a fabulous job."

This year flu vaccine is widely available in hospitals, physician offices and many public settings, including some public clinics being held through the end of the year.

Flu spreads easily throughout a workplace, school, community and family. Getting vaccinated this year and every year is the first and best way to protect yourself and everyone around you from illness.

Everyone age 6 months and older is recommended to have an annual flu vaccination, especially pregnant women, people with chronic medical conditions such as asthma, diabetes or heart disease, health care workers and first responders, and family members and caregivers of those too young to be vaccinated, or who may be more likely to have serious complications if they get sick.

Flu Vaccine Facts:

- The flu is more than just a nuisance. Influenza can be a serious and sometimes life-threatening disease. Flu and its related complications can cause hospitalizations and even death.
- The flu vaccine is updated each season to protect against the three flu viruses that research shows will cause the most illness. At this time, the vaccine is well matched to the flu strains now circulating in the U.S.
- Because flu viruses are always changing, last season's flu vaccine may not protect against new viruses, and getting vaccinated every year is the only way to stay protected each season.
- The flu shot cannot give you the flu. Flu vaccine is used to prevent the flu, not treat the flu. Over the past 50 years, flu vaccines have been shown to be safe.
- With flu activity increasing, family and friends gathering for the holidays, and cold weather setting in, now is a great time to get a flu vaccine.

For more information about the flu, go to flu.gov, healthvermont.gov or dial 2-1-1.

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