



Pediatric Lung Doctor Works to Protect People Most at Risk from H1N1 Flu

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

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BURLINGTON - Patients under the care of pediatric pulmonologist Thomas Lahiri, MD, were among those at highest risk for serious complications, illness and death from the H1N1 influenza virus. Dr. Lahiri closely followed the path of the virus as it arrived in the United States in April and spread across the country and in Vermont.

"Patients with lung disease are at high risk of complications such as a secondary bacterial pneumonia and respiratory failure," Dr. Lahiri said. "We were worried. And I don't know if it's over yet."

More than 90 percent of Lahiri's patients were vaccinated against the H1N1 flu. People at high risk for serious flu complications include young children, pregnant women, and people with chronic health conditions such as asthma, diabetes or heart and lung disease.

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

Vermont has been fortunate not to have any pediatric deaths related to the H1N1 flu. A total of 43 children have been hospitalized with H1N1-related illness since Sept. 1, 2009. Twenty-nine percent of the 141 Vermonters who were sick enough to be hospitalized were admitted to an intensive care unit.

Dr. Lahiri, 40, a teaching physician with Fletcher Allen Health Care (and an associate professor at the University of Vermont's College of Medicine for the past eight years) set a goal of 100 percent vaccination of his patients. Some patients expressed concern that the new vaccine wasn't fully tested. They had to be told, sometimes repeatedly, that they could not get the flu from the shots.

Lahiri said he would not give up trying to convince those few patients who refused the shot to change their minds and get vaccinated.

"There was so much media coverage and there were very few people who thought 'It's not going to happen to me,'" Lahiri said.

Vaccine is now available at a wide variety of sites including health care provider offices, hospitals, work sites, pharmacies, and public clinics being held around the state.

To locate a vaccination clinic, go to the Health Department's website at www.healthvermont.gov, then select "Get Vaccinated" at the top of the home page. Guidelines for deciding about medical care are available at the Health Department's website: www.healthvermont.gov or dial 2-1-1, and at the federal website flu.gov. You can also follow us on Twitter at twitter.com/healthvermont.

Vaccine is also available at these participating locations: Shaws-Osco Pharmacy in Colchester, South Burlington, Williston, Berlin and Waterbury; Rite Aid in Derby, Bellows Falls, St. Albans and Williston; Walgreens in Rutland and Brattleboro, and Walmart in Williston and Rutland.

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