November 6, 2009

Dear School Community:

This letter addresses some questions raised about the nasal-spray formulation of the H1N1 vaccine being used as part of the school vaccination program.

**What is the nasal-spray H1N1 vaccine?**
The nasal-spray vaccine is made of a weakened strain of the H1N1 virus. The weakened vaccine strain has been made so that it does not cause flu or spread disease to others. It was developed to provide an alternative to injection for healthy people who want to protect themselves or their close contacts from influenza.

**Is the nasal-spray H1N1 vaccine safe?**
The nasal-spray H1N1 vaccine is made in exactly the same way as the nasal-spray seasonal influenza vaccine, which has been used safely for the past six years. Some people may experience runny nose or headache after getting the vaccine, but those symptoms are typically mild and transient.

**Who can get the nasal-spray H1N1 vaccine?**
The nasal-spray vaccine is recommended for healthy individuals between 2 years and 49 years of age.

**Who should not receive the nasal-spray H1N1 vaccine, and why not?**
Out of an abundance of caution, the nasal spray vaccine is recommended only for groups in which it has been tested for safety. The following groups of people should not receive the nasal-spray vaccine until further studies have been conducted:

- People with medical conditions that increase the risk of severe illness or complications from influenza*
- Children 2 through 4 years old who have experienced wheezing in the past year
- Pregnant women
- People with a history of severe allergy to chicken eggs, or to a previous dose of influenza vaccine

*These include asthma, diabetes, chronic heart and lung conditions, kidney failure, a weakened immune system, or (for adolescents) long-term aspirin therapy.

**Can a person who receives the nasal-spray vaccine transmit the weakened H1N1 virus to people with medical problems (such as asthma), causing them to get sick?**
No, the nasal-spray vaccine is a weakened virus and does not spread illness. While sensitive tests have shown that it is rare for the weakened virus from the vaccine to spread to another person, it has not been shown to cause illness. The nasal-spray vaccine can safely be given to household members and other close contacts of people at risk of influenza complications, including pregnant women and people with asthma.
**Besides vaccination what else can I do to guard against influenza?**

The best way to avoid influenza is to reinforce the following preventive measures:

- Wash your hands often.
- Keep your hands away from your face and avoid touching your mouth, nose and eye.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes with tissues or the inside of your elbow.

For additional information, you may contact your health care provider or the supervising medical doctor for your school, Dr. _________________________________. Additional information may also be downloaded from [nyc.gov/flu](http://nyc.gov/flu).