

County Conducts Assault Against H1N1 “Swine Flu” Virus



On April 29, 2009, the day after the state proclaimed an H1N1 flu emergency, the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors declared a Local Emergency related to the H1N1 Influenza virus infection. The H1N1 outbreak subsequently resulted in the World Health Organization declaring a Worldwide H1N1 Pandemic on June 11, 2009, and the United States proclaiming a National H1N1 Emergency on October 24, 2009.

The H1N1 influenza virus, of swine origin, has a variety of symptoms similar to the seasonal flu but severe illnesses and deaths have occurred as a result of illness associated with this virus. Following San Bernardino County’s Local Emergency declaration, the county Department of Public Health began coordinating response efforts working with all of the county’s 24 cities and towns, special districts and unincorporated areas.



The initial response effort was a media and public information campaign which included distributing health information to the public on topics such as prevention, providing guidance to healthcare providers, schools and agencies all serving county residents. The information was immediately disseminated through press releases, public service announcements, flyers, posters, website updates, radio and television interviews, presentations and electronic communication. This was followed with a detailed action plan that included additional H1N1 education, monitoring of the disease, medication response and a vaccination campaign.



The H1N1 vaccination campaign began in the Fall of 2009 and through the end of December 2009, more than 28,000 county residents were vaccinated. This coordinated response was accomplished through partnerships with cities and towns, school districts, more than 500 healthcare providers, and hospitals. The H1N1 vaccinations were made available through nearly 40 mass clinics countywide staged at Public Health clinics, school-based sites, colleges, and other large-scale venues.

San Bernardino County’s first H1N1 Influenza case was reported on May 1, 2009. There were 367 H1N1 confirmed cases of which resulted in 157 hospitalizations and 41 deaths. 2009 ended on a good note with the number of cases dropping but efforts will continue through February 2010 in an attempt to avoid another widespread outbreak.

Reaching Out to the Public

In 2009, San Bernardino County tightened its focus on providing both county residents and employees with up-to-date information on current events and available services. This effort proved successful through the implementation of a new countywide toll-free number to access services, the development and delivery of the “At Your Service” Resident Guide, and the launch of the internal electronic newsletter “ServiceLine.”

In March, the county created a new toll-free telephone number, (888) 818-8988, residents can use to connect the county’s multitude of vital services. Until then, the county employed a series of ordinary phone numbers serving various regions of the county. The toll-free number routes calls to live operators who are trained in the various services provided by the county.

In June, the county began heavily publicizing the new toll-free number as it rolled out its “At Your Service” public outreach campaign, which is intended to inform residents about the many services provided by the county and help people connect with the services they need. The campaign features as its centerpiece the “At Your Service” Resident Guide. The colorful 16-page booklet includes detailed information about the county, its 24 cities, and contact information for virtually every service available to the public. Contents include critical information for residents that have lost jobs, are facing foreclosure, coping with family crisis or need other vital county services. Additionally it provides information ranging from job training, pest control and healthcare to camping, senior centers and wedding licenses – all of the most frequently used public services. Published in both English and Spanish, the county delivered it to more than 200,000 households, including all of the unincorporated areas and nearly 90,000 additional households with subscriptions to area newspapers. The guides were also made available online and provided on public counters in county buildings.

Another key step in the comprehensive outreach effort was the November debut of “ServiceLine.” An electronic publication developed and made available to county employees through the county’s intranet site Countyline, “ServiceLine” provides monthly information on countywide calendar events, services provided to the public as well as services available to employees. Additionally, “ServiceLine” is used to highlight employees providing outstanding public service, respond to questions and comments received through the Service Suggestion Box, and news from various county departments.

