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## **Broome County Health Department Seeks Community Input on Local H1N1 Response**

**BINGHAMTON, NY** - The Broome County Health Department is seeking community input on the efforts put forth to protect the community from illness during the H1N1 flu pandemic. To help control the spread of the virus, the Health Department sought to provide the community with up-to-date information and partnered with local school districts, private schools and secondary institutions to make vaccine widely available. A community survey has been established on the Health Department's H1N1 website: <http://www.gobroomecounty.com/hd/flu> to help us evaluate the various activities associated with the H1N1 response in Broome County.

“The response to the H1N1 flu pandemic involved a multifaceted and rapid approach to help ward off serious illness from affecting the public,” said Broome County Public Health Director Claudia Edwards. “The Health Department quickly activated mass vaccination plans to prepare for the arrival of vaccine and continued to advance information to the public to help aid in protecting the public from illness.”

### **The H1N1 Pandemic**

The first laboratory confirmed H1N1 case in Broome County was identified on May 27, 2009. Earlier in the spring of 2009, health officials had began providing information to alert the public about this new strain of flu virus that had the potential to sicken millions and in some cases even cause death. Soon, vaccine was being developed to be distributed throughout the country to help protect people from becoming infected. In October 2009, the government declared a national health emergency as state and local public health departments were preparing to distribute vaccine and host mass vaccination clinics to overcome H1N1.

### **Broome County's Response to the Pandemic**

Luckily, the overall response to the H1N1 flu pandemic was successful in minimizing widespread illness in the United States. State and local health departments implemented mass distribution and community vaccination plans which are not part of typical everyday department functions. Public health officials monitored infection rates and continued to keep the public apprised of virus information for the duration of the pandemic. Locally, the Broome County Health Department held over 100 mass vaccination clinics throughout the county to help protect the Greater Binghamton community from illness. As soon as vaccine was available, the Health Department arranged clinics known as PODs (Point of Dispensing) to distribute the vaccine in public and private schools, shopping centers, large housing complexes and also supplied local hospitals and medical offices with vaccine. Health officials also promoted and encouraged general precautions such as hand washing and social distancing to avoid the spread of disease.

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In total, the Health Department alone administered over 17,000 doses of H1N1 vaccine at the PODs held throughout the community. Early estimates indicate over 25% of the Broome County population was vaccinated which includes vaccine administered by Binghamton University, Broome Community College, health care organizations and physicians' offices.

To keep the public informed, the Broome County Health Department maintained a website to provide current information, accessible 24 hours a day 7 days a week. There, information was posted about prevention techniques, symptoms, illness and local clinic schedules. Not only was information provided on the website, but the Health Department also pushed out information on Twitter and Facebook, purchased radio advertising and sent letters home to parents in partnership with local school districts about H1N1 activities. Questions, comments, and concerns from the public were able to be submitted by calling a dedicated H1N1 information line and by e-mailing the Health Department via the website. This outreach heightened awareness and encouraged greater attendance at community clinics.

### **Community H1N1 Survey**

The Broome County Health Department would like feedback from the community on the local response to the H1N1 flu pandemic. A short community survey has been created and posted on the Broome County Health Department webpage. The public is encouraged to visit <http://www.gobroomecounty.com/hd/flu> to provide feedback on the Health Department's efforts to protect the community from illness during the H1N1 pandemic. Information provided will be evaluated and used to improve local emergency response plans and mass dispensing activities.

“Initial evaluation during the course of the pandemic has been positive,” said Claudia Edwards Broome County Public Health Director. “Community partners who assisted the Health Department in distributing vaccine greatly valued our successful community outreach and ability to dispense vaccine and information to the public. However, we can always do better and feel that a formal community evaluation regarding local efforts to combat H1N1 would be extremely helpful in assessing our response and mass vaccination plans.”

For more information on H1N1 and the local public health response activities for pandemic flu, visit the Broome County Health Department's H1N1 website at <http://www.gobroomecounty.com/hd/flu>.

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