

Preparation for the 2009 H1N1 Flu Pandemic

October 7, 2009

On October 7, 2009, Governor Strickland officially declared an emergency that affects the public health due to the national H1N1 influenza pandemic and the additional human resources that Ohio's public health agencies will need to quickly receive, distribute, account for, and provide vaccine to as many Ohioans as possible. Governor Strickland's declaration of emergency allows only **EMT-Intermediates and EMT-Paramedics** who are certified under Section 4765.30 of the Ohio Revised Code to perform H1N1 immunizations and administer drugs or dangerous drugs related to the H1N1 virus provided they:

- (1) have received the appropriate **training** and;
- (2) are under physician **medical direction**.

The administration of any other immunizations (i.e. hepatitis, seasonal influenza, smallpox, or tetanus) remains *outside* of the Ohio EMS scope of practice.

Training:

The "H1N1 Vaccinations for Ohio EMS Personnel" training module, which was created by the Ohio Department of Public Safety, Division of EMS in conjunction with the Ohio Department of Health, is posted on the Ohio Department of Public Safety, Division of EMS website at www.ems.ohio.gov. The training module is free-of-charge and is composed of a Power Point presentation, an H1N1 immunization skills checklist, Appendix D of the *Epidemiology and Prevention of Vaccine-Preventable Diseases*, and an instructor guide. I recommend up to three continuing education hours (two hours for the Power Point presentation and one hour for the skills portion of the training module) be awarded for the completion of the module provided that the program is presented in compliance with OAC 4765-7-11, 4765-18-02, and 4765-19-01. The training module is also is compliant with the EMS Board recommendation of August 19, 2009 that the required appropriate training be provided by and based upon the parameters of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). I strongly urge you to contact your local public health agency to explore the resources that are available for any of the costs that may be incurred for H1N1 immunization training as well as for the manpower hours from EMS providers that may be requested by public health departments for participation in their mass immunization programs.

Please note that H1N1 immunizations may be deemed public health or occupational health care, which has a different standard of care than emergency medical care. Likewise, preventative medicine, which includes the administration of immunizations, differs significantly from the delivery of emergency medical services where immediate care must be provided in a "life or death" scenario. Although all of these specialties of

health care delivery require the ability to identify at-risk populations, contraindications to medications, and the creation of a medical record, the standard of care for public health and occupational health also mandates the maintenance of ongoing medical records and the ability to provide follow-up care. The “H1N1 Vaccinations for Ohio EMS Personnel” training module contains guidelines from the CDC for the creation of immunization records, the patient and vaccine data that should be recorded, and the information that must be provided to the patient before and after the immunization has been given. Although this information is provided by the CDC and is compliant with the EMS Board’s recommendation, local public health departments retain the authority and oversight for the patient screening processes, patient care documentation, maintenance of medical records, and provision of follow-up care for their immunization programs.

Medical Direction:

On August 19, 2009, the EMS Board also recommended that the protocols for administration of the H1N1 immunizations by Ohio EMT-Intermediates and EMT-Paramedics be provided and overseen by local public health agencies. As such, the physician providing medical oversight during Ohio’s H1N1 mass immunization campaign should be designated by the local public health agency. In many cases, the designated physician medical director will not be the physician who serves as the EMS medical director of the EMS agency. Local physician medical directors of EMS providers participating in the administration of the H1N1 immunizations retain the authority to require additional training of the EMT-Intermediates and EMT-Paramedics whom they oversee.

FAQs:

Pharmacy License: The H1N1 vaccine and any of its formulations are **not** required to be included or added as an amendment to an EMS agency’s State Board of Pharmacy license. However, the medications that may be administered to treat an individual who has an adverse or anaphylactic reaction to the H1N1 vaccine *should* be listed on the State Board of Pharmacy license as the administration of these are medications provided in the delivery of emergency medical care.

CDC Priorities: Currently, the at-risk populations that have been identified by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) remain unchanged. The at-risk populations are health care workers, pregnant women, all people from 6 months through 24 years of age, household contacts and caregivers for children younger than 6 months of age, and people aged 25 years through 64 years who have health conditions associated with higher risk of medical complications from influenza. The first doses of the H1N1 vaccine are anticipated to be available during the first week of October; however, it will most likely be only the intranasal formulation. As you will note within the “H1N1 Vaccinations by Ohio EMS Personnel” training module, the intranasal formulation is contraindicated for several segments of the at-risk populations identified by the CDC.

Closing Thoughts:

I am confident that our EMS system in Ohio will step up to the plate and serve as a vital element in the H1N1 mass immunization campaign. As the upcoming months approach, our emergency care system may be tested in a fashion that it has never been seen in the past. Yet, I know we will overcome the inherent challenges along the way, utilize the lessons learned to further improve the delivery of all forms of health care in Ohio, and emerge as a stronger system. I hope that all of you and your colleagues will benefit from the “H1N1 Vaccination for Ohio EMS Personnel” training module, but more importantly, please do not forget to exercise two crucial actions for all of your daily patient encounters. Hand washing and the use of appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) are the best avenues to prevent the spread of any infectious disease. You cannot adequately care for others unless you also care for yourself, so it imperative that you wash your hands, wear your PPE, and get vaccinated.

As we undertake this new challenge, I, along with the Ohio Department of Public Safety, Division of EMS, plan to fully serve you and your EMS system as Ohio tackles the spread of the H1N1 influenza pandemic. Until we meet again, wash your hands, wear your PPE, get vaccinated, and stay safe. As always, thank you for the dedicated service you provide to the residents and visitors of Ohio.

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