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Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

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Alaska records first H1N1 related fatality

Officials encourage Alaskans to be prepared

(Anchorage, AK) — A Fairbanks woman in her 40s with underlying medical conditions has died due to complications involving the H1N1 flu virus. The death occurred on July 16, 2009, while she was out of state. This is the first H1N1-related fatality recorded of an Alaskan.

“Our hearts go out to this woman’s family and friends,” said Dr. Joe McLaughlin, Alaska’s State Epidemiologist. “Although most confirmed cases of pandemic H1N1 have resulted in mild illness, this is a sad reminder of how serious influenza infection can be, particularly to persons with underlying medical conditions.”

Health officials are anticipating increased flu activity throughout the nation, including locally, when schools reopen beginning in August.

Efforts are underway to develop an H1N1 vaccine that could be available in Alaska later in the year. While the amounts and delivery dates are being worked out at this time, the state Division of Public Health–H1N1 Task Force is working with local, state and tribal partners to determine the most effective way to distribute vaccine as it becomes available.

In the meantime, the division encourages everyone to prepare now for the expected resurgence of H1N1 in the fall:

- Individuals and families should make plans now for keeping themselves and their children at home and away from work, school and child care if they become ill, and not return until they are no longer infectious. This also means working with schools to assure that learning continues at home whenever possible.
- Businesses and organizations should use the summer months to prepare for a reduced workforce if many become ill or need to stay at home. Employers are also encouraged to allow for flexibility in sick leave policies so that staff may stay home and not infect others, as well as care for sick family members and children.

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- Health care providers and hospitals should be prepared for a surge in patient volume, and review patient triage and staffing plans.
- People should plan to get vaccinated for both the pandemic H1N1 influenza strain and seasonal influenza in the fall. The seasonal influenza vaccine will be readily available earlier in the fall than the H1N1 vaccine. Once H1N1 vaccine becomes available, additional vaccination recommendations will be forthcoming.

For more information on pandemic H1N1 go to: <http://www.pandemicflu.alaska.gov/>

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