

STATE OF ALASKA

DEPT. OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES
DIVISION OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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An Open Letter to the Citizens of Fairbanks and the North Star Borough:

As the director of Public Health and the chief medical officer for the Department of Health and Social Services, I want you to know that combating novel H1N1 influenza, or swine flu, is my top priority.

The H1N1 virus has been circulating throughout Alaska since May 2009. We estimate that thousands of Alaskans have been infected, the vast majority showing mild symptoms and recovering at home, but some have suffered severe illness and three people have died from influenza-related complications. As a community, we need to support each other through our grief and concern by staying informed and being prepared.

Our department is working with local health-care providers and public health staff, cities and boroughs, and military and tribal partners to make sure that the H1N1 vaccine gets to all Alaskans as soon as the first shipments arrive in October. **We expect to receive enough vaccine for everyone**, but priority groups for the initial batches include pregnant women; anyone who lives with or cares for children younger than 6 months; anyone age 6 months to 24 years; health-care and emergency service workers; and adults age 25–64 who have chronic health conditions.

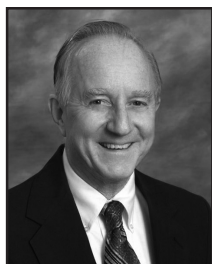
I also urge everyone to get vaccinated against seasonal influenza right now. Seasonal flu shots are available at most private care providers, pharmacies and, beginning next week, the Fairbanks Public Health Center on West Barnett. Remember, you'll need both vaccines — seasonal and H1N1 — for full protection against influenza this flu season.

The symptoms of both H1N1 and seasonal flu include fever, cough, sore throat, chills, runny nose, fatigue, body aches, headache, vomiting and/or diarrhea. Those with severe illness or at high risk for flu complications, such as pregnant women and people with chronic illnesses, should contact a health-care provider or get medical attention if they have flu-like symptoms.

The following emergency warning signs need urgent medical attention: difficulty breathing or fast breathing; chest pain; dehydration, not taking in or keeping in fluids; a bluish gray or dusky skin tone; confusion or irritability; persistent vomiting; and flu symptoms that improve but then return with a fever and worse cough.

All of us can make a difference by practicing these simple steps as part of our flu-fighting routine: 1) wash your hands often; 2) avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth; 3) cover your cough or sneeze with tissue or your sleeve; 4) stay home if you're sick; and 5) get vaccinated.

As we head into the flu season, get prepared and stay informed. You can find information, guidelines and links on our Web site, www.pandemicflu.alaska.gov, or by contacting us directly.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ward B. Hurlburt". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Ward B. Hurlburt, M.D., M.P.H.
Director, Division of Public Health
Chief Medical Officer, State of Alaska