



# St. John's Episcopal Hospital

## Novel H1N1 Influenza A (Swine Flu) Update

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), influenza activity is continuing in the U.S. with 49 states, including New York State, reporting infection at this time (sporadic activity being most prevalent). Nationwide, visits to doctors for influenza-like-illness continue to decrease and are now lower than what is seen at the peak of many regular flu seasons. Laboratory surveillance data indicate that novel H1N1 influenza A (swine flu) remains the predominant subtype currently circulating. This prevalent strain remains quite similar to the virus chosen for the 2009 novel H1N1 vaccine and continues to be susceptible to the neuraminidase inhibitor antiviral drugs oseltamivir (Tamiflu) and zanamivir (Relenza) with rare exception.

Overall influenza activity and hospitalizations remain at a relatively low level in NYC at this time. The initial wave of pandemic influenza which we experienced during this past spring and summer was relatively mild, nonetheless the 2009 autumn wave was associated with more severe illness. The city is gearing up and preparing for a potential resurgence of pandemic influenza virus illness since we are now entering the time of year that most influenza activity has usually been reported by the CDC.

The most effective way to prevent influenza infection is via vaccination. Currently there are two types of novel H1N1 vaccines available, including the inactivated monovalent vaccine for intramuscular injection and the live-attenuated intranasal spray vaccine. The H1N1 novel vaccines are licensed by the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) and considered as safe as the regular seasonal vaccines. The novel H1N1 vaccine was produced and certified using the same process as the seasonal vaccine, with which millions of Americans are immunized each year. The novel H1N1 swine flu vaccine was subjected to efficacy and safety studies and immunologic effect and adverse events were similar to seasonal influenza vaccines.

The most important issues are protection of ourselves, our families and our neighbors against possible illness that may change our lives. Clearly studies have shown that diminished illness and death are associated with vaccination, particularly for those with chronic underlying diseases that make them most susceptible to the complications of influenza virus infection!

*February 2010*