



Kaiser replenishes swine flu vaccine

By Rachel Raskin-Zrihen

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After months of sketchy availability, Kaiser Permanente Medical Center, Vallejo, is now flush with swine flu vaccine, even as the public's fear of H1N1 may be winding down.

Flu fears may be taking a back seat to other issues for many people, but this is not necessarily so for health officials and local hospitals, which are taking different prevention approaches to who may visit their facilities.

With the arrival of more vaccine, Kaiser also has opened its flu clinic to all its members, said Stephen Parodi, chief of infectious diseases for Kaiser Permanente Napa Solano.

"We now have ample supplies of H1N1 vaccine, and are encouraging all our members to get it," Parodi said. Kaiser members can call 1-800-KP-Flu-11 for site-specific clinic hours, he added.

Sutter Solano Medical Center is only offering the vaccine to hospital staff, spokesman Russell "Sy" Neilson said. Sutter Regional Medical Foundation is offering the H1N1 vaccine to patients through their primary care centers in Vallejo, Fairfield, Rio Vista and Vacaville, he added. The Vallejo clinic, 100 Hospital Drive, is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., and appointments can be made by calling (707) 427-4900, he said.

About a month ago, Kaiser Vallejo implemented a policy restricting visitors to those 14 and older. Sutter Solano Medical Center has not taken that step.

Sutter officials have devised a similar policy but will implement it only if the need arises, Neilson said.

"We haven't made any changes in our visitor policy because we've been meeting as a team to assess the situation, and decided if we saw an increase in the number of people who present with flu-like symptoms that could be H1N1, we'd enact the policy," Neilson said. "We haven't seen that. But we do have a tiered policy ready if the situation warrants."

Kaiser doesn't now allow any visitors under 14, or anyone with flu-like symptoms, spokesman Jim Caroompas said. That information greets callers to Kaiser's phone lines, he said.

"We decided to implement a policy with no visitors under 14 ... during the current H1N1 epidemic," Parodi said. "We want to provide optimal protection to our patients and employees during this epidemic."

Since younger children are more susceptible to the negative impacts of what's been called the swine flu, children are asked not to visit hospitalized patients, Parodi said.

"We've updated our members through our flu hotline and our regular operators and we've updated our staff," Parodi said. "We also ask anyone with flu-like symptoms -- especially a cough or a fever over 100 degrees -- not to visit."

Kaiser officials plan to maintain the policy at least through March, Parodi said.

"The plan is to enforce this through when we determine there will be no new waves of H1N1 activity," he said. "Now it's impossible to tell. Normal seasonal flu season is through March, so it will be at least that long."

An H1N1 wave in October and November seems to be waning, but unlike seasonal flu, pandemic flus like H1N1 can pass through several periods any time of the year, Parodi said. "We must still remain vigilant," he said. "Pandemic influenza doesn't follow the rules of regular seasonal influenza."

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