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2009 Influenza Update -- Sept. 21, 2009

The emergence of a new 2009 H1N1 influenza (Swine flu) virus this flu season has caused a global outbreak of influenza. The 2009 H1N1 influenza virus, along with the regular seasonal viruses, will likely cause more illness and hospitalizations than we see during a normal flu season. A typical influenza season peaks in January or February. This year we saw flu activity during the summer months when influenza is usually very uncommon.

H1N1 is a contagious respiratory illness caused by an influenza virus, which spreads person to person in respiratory droplets of coughs and sneezes (airborne or on contaminated surfaces). An infected adult is able to infect others 1 day before his or her symptoms develop and up to 5 to 7 days after they become ill. The 2009 H1N1 has shown higher infectivity and milder symptoms compared to the typical seasonal flu virus. The H1N1 virus also shows lower preference for the older population and tends to be more severe in children under the age of 2, pregnant women, obese individuals, and the elderly.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is recommending every person "Take 2" actions to fight the seasonal and 2009 H1N1 influenza:

1. Take the seasonal flu vaccine and when available, also take the 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine. It is important to be vaccinated against both viruses, because seasonal vaccine does not protect against the 2009 H1N1 virus. A new vaccine against 2009 H1N1 is being produced and is recommended for those at greatest risk for the infection. Health care workers, young children, pregnant women and people with chronic health conditions will be given priority.
2. Take everyday preventive actions such as covering your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and disposing of the tissue in the trash or coughing or sneezing into your elbow. Wash your hands often with soap and water and/or an alcohol-based hand rub. Avoid touching your eyes nose and mouth since viruses spread this way. Avoid close contact with sick people. If you are sick with a flu-like illness, stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone, without use of fever reducing medications, and avoid contact with others to prevent spreading the infection. To lessen the spread of flu, follow public health advice, avoid crowds and take additional measures to keep your distance from others.

The Pandemic Working Group at NASA Headquarters is developing a NASA Pandemic Plan to ensure that mission essential functions are maintained. The Office of Protective Services has overall responsibility for the plan while working closely with the Office of the Chief Health and Medical Officer and the Office of Human Capital Management. The Pandemic Plan addresses organizational roles and responsibilities, operations, human resources, personal protective equipment and communications. More information from the Pandemic Working Group on the NASA Pandemic Plan and a Web site is forthcoming. The NASA Occupational Health Web site

(<http://www.ohp.nasa.gov>) has regular updates and a number of links to credible organizations and resources.

NASA Center Occupational Health (OH) Clinics will have a supply of seasonal influenza vaccine available in late September or early October. Everyone is encouraged to get the seasonal flu vaccine as soon as possible. The 2009 H1N1 vaccine is expected to be available by late October. Final plans for distribution of the 2009 H1N1 vaccine in the federal government are still under discussion.

The Office of the Chief Health and Medical Officer and the OH Clinic at your center will be announcing the availability of vaccine and the distribution plan to you as soon as possible. When the supply of H1N1 influenza vaccine becomes available, priority distribution will be based on the recommendations of the CDC and the Advisory Committee on Immunizations Practices (ACIP). For protection against both the seasonal flu vaccine and the 2009 H1N1 flu vaccine for this flu season, at least two shots will be needed (one for seasonal flu and one for 2009 H1N1).

The Office of the Chief Health and Medical Officer will continue to publish updates on the 2009 H1N1 pandemic as more information becomes available. The following Web sites also contain useful and comprehensive information about this emerging disease:

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.flu.gov>
- The World Health Organization: <http://www.who.int/en>
- NASA Occupational Health Web site: <http://www.ohp.nasa.gov>