

**LIVE H1N1 FORUM**

## Live Call-in Show Gives H1N1 Answers

BY STEVE SMITH Staff Writer



Director of Emergency Management Michael Purcaro and Mayor Jason McCoy listen, as Dr. Lynn Sosa, Deputy State Epidemiologist answers a phone call from a citizen concerned about H1N1 during a live call-in show broadcast on local cable last Thursday evening. - Photo by Steve Smith.

In an effort to educate the public and dispel myths, the Town of Vernon invited a panel of experts to Town Hall last Thursday for an update on the H1N1 virus that was broadcast on local cable, and invited residents to call in with their concerns and questions about the virus.

“We hear from the public and others about their concerns,” Mayor Jason McCoy told viewers. “This forum is one of the many strategies we are trying to

put together to support you and allow you to make important decisions for yourself and your families.” One caller asked about the potential side-effects of the H1N1 vaccine. Dr. Lynn Sosa, Deputy State Epidemiologist for Connecticut, said the symptoms are often related to the act of the vaccination itself.

“Most of the side-effects are pain at the site where the injection is given,” she said. “Sometimes people might have a low-grade fever, or feel a little tired after the vaccine. A lot of times people interpret this as getting the flu from the flu vaccine, but that is not possible. Rarely do people have more systemic or serious side effects.”

Sosa said that persons under the age of 5, over the age of 65, pregnant women, persons in long-term care facilities, and those more prone to be effected by seasonal influenza because of other medical conditions, are among those most at risk for complications from H1N1.

Another resident wanted to know if teachers in the age group least affected (24-64 ), should seek the vaccine, since they are in close contact with schoolaged children. Sosa said that as the vaccine is distributed to people age 24 and under, the concern for teachers should be less.



Dr. Ellen Neuhaus, Medical Director of Epidemiology for EHCN (left) and Vernon Public Schools Health Coordinator Sue Beirn, RN, help answer some residents' questions about H1N1 - Photo by Steve Smith

“The idea is that if you can get most school-aged children vaccinated, then you don’t have to worry so much about teachers getting vaccinated, because they aren’t going to be exposed to the virus anymore,” she said, adding that as more vaccines become available, teachers and anyone else concerned should seek the shot.

One caller wanted to know about the anxiety of the flu becoming pandemic, as compared to the SARS scare. Sosa said that H1N1 is more comparable to

the seasonal flu than to SARS, which is a completely different type of disease. “H1N1 flu has not changed since the beginning of April when we first learned about it, and the severity seems to be equal to that of seasonal influenza ,” Sosa said.

Dr. Ellen Neuhaus, Medical Director of Epidemiology for EHCN, agreed that the same people who have problems with seasonal flu are the ones who should be more concerned and more vigilant about H1N1. “We do encourage those people, especially , to get the vaccine,” she said, “to wash their hands and take care of themselves, because they are more likely to see complications from this influenza .”

Resident Bill Wardrop wanted to know if there was a plan in place to get more hand sanitizers in public places. Town Hall and other buildings already have the sanitizer dispensers strategically placed, and there are more planned, especially for schools, said Vernon Public Schools Health Coordinator Sue Beirn.



Resident Bill Wardrop hopes to see more preventative measures. – Photo by Steve Smith

Emergency Management Director for the Town of Vernon Michael Purcaro said the hospital rates for influenza are higher than expected for this year, and many states are experiencing widespread influenza, however, Connecticut is not one of those states.

“According to the CDC,” Purcaro said, “almost all of influenza viruses identified so far [this season] are the H1N1 Influenza-A virus.”

Purcaro said a state task force has been developing pandemic flu plans, but the best defense is still simple preventative measures to slow disease transmission, such as washing hands often, covering coughs, and staying home when sick, will “all make a big difference.”

For more information, visit [www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu](http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu), or [www.ct.gov/ctfluwatch](http://www.ct.gov/ctfluwatch).

###

VERNON OCT. 13, 2009

# Reminder News

IN TOLLAND COUNTY

## CHAMBER'S NEW YEAR

New officers named PAGE 18

Director of Emergency Management for Vernon and Mayor Jason McCoy listen, as Dr. Lynn Sosa, Deputy State Epidemiologist answers a phone call from a citizen concerned about H1N1 during a live call-in show broadcast on local cable last Thursday evening. Photo by Steve Smith.

### LIVE H1N1 FORUM

PAGE 2