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H1N1 Hospitalizations and Deaths on the Rise in Georgia

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ATLANTA - Now is not the time to drop our guard on H1N1 vaccinations, said state officials from the Georgia Department of Community Health (DCH) at a press conference today at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta at Egleston Hospital. There have been a total of 1,012 H1N1 hospitalizations and 72 influenza associated deaths in Georgia since April 2009. Children are one of the most vulnerable populations affected by H1N1, and it is vitally important that some of them receive the required two doses of the 2009 H1N1 vaccine.

□We are concerned that a significant number of Georgians have not received the H1N1 vaccine and especially children between the ages of six months and nine years of age that should be receiving two doses of the vaccine,□ said Dr. M. Rony Francois, MD, MSPH, PhD, Director of DCH's Division of Public Health. □We are asking all Georgians to remain vigilant about the H1N1 virus and its complications. Getting vaccinated is the best way to protect you and your loved ones from the flu.□

Currently, Georgia is one of five states that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) list with regional influenza activity. While seasonal flu usually runs from October through May, H1N1 is still circulating and may continue for many months. Georgia experienced its first wave last spring and peaked with a second wave in September.

□We aren't 100 percent sure that a third wave is occurring or will occur, but if there is a third wave it may happen in our state first,□ said Dr. Patrick O'Neal, Director of DCH's Division of Emergency Preparedness & Response. □What we do know is that residents need to continue taking precautions against the flu and seek vaccination if they haven't been vaccinated.□

Pharmacies and doctor's offices across the state still have a good supply of the vaccine, and people are encouraged to find a provider near them and to get vaccinated. It is highly recommended for children between the ages of six months and nine years of age. Other high risk groups are:

- Pregnant women
- Health care and emergency medical personnel with direct patient contact
- People who live with or care for infants younger than 6 months
- Anyone from 6 months to 24 years of age
- Seniors and anyone with underlying medical conditions that put them at risk for flu-related complications

For complete information or to learn more about flu prevention, visit <http://health.state.ga.us/h1n1flu> or call 1-888-H1N1-INFO (1-888-4161-4636).