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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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National Influenza Vaccination Week

Free H1N1 Vaccinations Still Available at OCCHD

This Sunday marks the beginning of National Influenza Vaccination Week, January 10-16, 2010. In observance of the event, the Oklahoma City-County Health Department (OCCHD) is urging residents to continue taking steps that will help our community avoid a third wave of H1N1 influenza cases.

H1N1 flu is a serious disease. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that between the first wave of cases in April and the second wave running through mid-November, 47 million people in the United States were infected with the 2009 H1N1 flu, more than 200,000 people were hospitalized, and over 9,800 people died. Since September 1st of 2009, 1045 Oklahomans have been hospitalized with flu-like illness and 40 have died. In Oklahoma County, we've had 252 hospitalizations since September 1st, and 11 deaths.

"The H1N1 flu has presented our community with a unique challenge in fighting this new type of influenza," says Oklahoma City-County Health Department Director Gary Cox. "If H1N1 remains active we could see another wave of serious illnesses," Cox says. On top of that, regular seasonal flu cases are beginning to show up. The seasonal flu usually peaks in late January, February or March.

"Influenza is unpredictable and we do not know the likelihood of a future wave of H1N1 flu, but we do know that vaccination is the most important step in protecting against influenza," Cox says.

Oklahoma County residents who have not yet been vaccinated have a window of opportunity to protect themselves and their loved ones from H1N1 and seasonal flu by getting vaccinated now.

The Oklahoma City-County Health Department is offering free H1N1 vaccinations at our main clinic at 921 NE 23rd Street in Oklahoma City (at NE 23rd & Kelley), Mondays through Thursdays from 7 AM to 5 PM. OCCHD is also planning community clinics at other locations. H1N1 vaccinations are also available from private providers including doctors and pharmacies.

OCCHD is also reminding parents of children under the age of 10 that two doses are needed to provide an adequate immune response. Booster immunizations should be given around one month after the initial vaccination.

Anyone bringing a child to one of the clinics who is not the parent or legal guardian must have a signed permission slip from the parent authorizing the immunizations. The slip must read:

I (full name parent) give permission for (full name of the person bringing the child) to obtain the H1N1 vaccination for: full names of all children and dates of birth. This slip must be signed and dated with the date the child comes to the clinic.

Legal guardians must bring written documentation of guardianship status.

While immunizations from the health department are free of charge, the health department will accept donations to help cover the cost of administering the vaccine.

For information on both seasonal and H1N1 influenza, please call 419-4123 or go the OCCHD website at: <http://www.occhd.org>

Healthy habits to practice during the flu season:

- Get vaccinated for H1N1 influenza
- Wash your hands often or use hand sanitizer if soap and water not available.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue into the trash directly afterward. If a tissue is not available, cough or sneeze into your shoulder or elbow.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Avoid close contact with sick people.
- Keep sick children at home.
- If you have flu-like symptoms (fever with a cough or sore throat), stay home until you are without a fever for 24 hours, without the use of medication.