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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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African Americans at Greater Risk from H1N1 Flu

OKLAHOMA CITY – In January 2010, nine more children in the United States died from complications related to H1N1 flu. Since last August, forty Oklahomans have died and an additional 1,091 have been hospitalized.

African Americans appear to be at increased risk of hospitalization or death from H1N1. Nationally, African Americans had a hospitalization rate for H1N1 flu that was more than double that of whites, Asians or Hispanics. In Oklahoma County, African Americans accounted for 33% of hospitalizations, even though only about 14% of the county’s population is black.

“That doesn’t mean there’s any sort of racial or genetic characteristic that would make blacks more susceptible to the flu – we don’t have any evidence of that – but there are a lot of other risk factors that make people in this community more vulnerable,” says Oklahoma City-County Health Department (OCCHD) Emergency Response epidemiologist Susan Harman.

One of those risks is a low rate of vaccination. Only about 3 percent of African Americans in Oklahoma County have been vaccinated against H1N1, compared with more than 13 percent of Hispanics and nearly 15 percent of Asians who have been vaccinated. And H1N1 hospitalization rates for Hispanics and Asians are proportionately lower.

OCCHD is making an effort to reach out to Oklahoma County’s African American community to encourage everyone to take advantage of one of the upcoming free H1N1 vaccinations clinics.

“Vaccination is such an easy step to take and it's the best protection we know of to fight this disease,” Harman says.

OCCHD is hosting a free H1N1 flu vaccination special event this Saturday, February 13, at the main health department building at 921 NE 23rd Street. Hours will be from 2 PM to 7 PM.

Radio station KVSP, “Power 103.5 FM” will provide music and prizes. Information will also be available about upcoming health screenings, as well as diabetes prevention and weight loss classes.

Clinics include:

Saturday, February 13, 2 PM to 7 PM
OCCHD Main Building
NE 23rd Street & Kelley Ave

Tuesday, February 16, 3 PM to 7 PM
Russell Babb Elementary
20901 NE 10, Harrah, OK

Wednesday and Thursday, February 17 and 18, 10 AM to 3 PM
Community Health Fair
Metro Transit Station
420 NW 5th (at NW 5th & Walker in Oklahoma City)

OCCHD and the Oklahoma City Indian Clinic will provide H1N1 vaccinations and other community groups will offer free dental screenings, vision screenings, blood pressure checks, emergency preparedness education, and other health services.

Thursday February 18, 10 AM to 2 PM
Oklahoma City Community College

Thursday February 18, 3:30 PM to 7 PM
Choctaw High School Cafeteria
14300 NE 10th

Saturday February 20, 9 AM to 4 PM
Strong and Healthy Oklahoma
Cox Convention Center
W Sheridan & N Broadway Ave in downtown OKC

Saturday February 20, 4:30 PM to 6:30 PM
“Our Community, Our Health”
Oklahoma State Capitol