

NEWS RELEASE
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For immediate release

H1N1 Vaccination Program Summary

The H1N1 mass vaccination and drop-in clinics ended in Sunrise Health Region on December 23, 2009, with 38 percent of people in the region choosing to be vaccinated. Vaccination is still available by appointment at local Public Health offices.

The age group 20-34 fell below the overall coverage for the region with only 26 percent of these people presenting for vaccination. This leaves 74 percent of young adults vulnerable to H1N1 illness, which could also impact the spread illness to others.

More than 21,497 people were vaccinated in the health region. This task was completed by fifteen public health nurses and two staff-health nurses, with additional assistance from seven full-time and casual nurses, ambulance personnel and volunteers. Unavailable are the number of persons who received H1N1 vaccinations on Key, Cote and Keeseekoose First Nations, communities served by federal health nurses.

“This major immunization program required the collective efforts of the health region and community,” says Chief Executive Officer for Sunrise Health Region, Joe Kirwan. “The local schools and communities were very supportive, often providing facilities. More than 300 people responded to our call for volunteers. The local newspapers, radio and CTV stations were extremely helpful in getting out the word about vaccination clinics and changes in eligible groups.”

H1N1 illness spread throughout the world in the spring of 2009. The World Health Organization declared H1N1 a global pandemic in June 2009. Saskatchewan reported the first H1N1 related death in June 2009, since then 15 deaths in Saskatchewan have been attributed to H1N1 illness.

Sunrise Health Region established an Emergency Operations Centre to coordinate the local response. Sunrise Health Region became part of a mass vaccination effort throughout Canada as health regions readied staff and facilities for the potential impact of pandemic illness.

Cases of H1N1 appeared sporadically in Sunrise Health Region beginning in the spring, tapering off during the summer months with larger numbers of people presenting with influenza-like illness in the fall. Most cases produced mild to moderate illness. Influenza illness in Sunrise Health Region was managed within the day-to-day operational capacity of the health region. The exception was establishment of two influenza assessment

centres in Yorkton and Melville for approximately one week when the volume of people presenting with influenza-like illness required this action.

“I want to thank members of the public and our partner agencies. People were exceptionally understanding of the frequent changes as the vaccination supply grew and eligibility broadened,” added Kirwan. “I am impressed by the patience of people who, although anxious for their own health, were willing to wait and allowed the most vulnerable to be vaccinated first.”

The H1N1 vaccination will continue to be available to anyone over six months of age. Contact local public health offices to arrange a vaccination appointment. Having a large percent of the population vaccinated reduces the spread of illness and will help prevent a third wave from claiming future H1N1 victims.

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