

By Carolyn Lee

The Imperial Republican

Two hundred doses of seasonal influenza vaccine were snapped up by people at Chase County Clinic in Imperial last Thursday.

A mass clinic was to have been held Oct. 22, but a snowstorm cancelled it. Lori Mendenhall of Chase County Community Hospital (CCCH) said people called the clinic, and all vaccine was distributed.

This was the second time CCCH has run out of the seasonal vaccine. Mendenhall said she doesn't know when the next shipment will be received. The hospital is notified of a shipment week to week.

In addition, about 60 doses of the H1N1 vaccine have been received by CCCH, but they've all been distributed.

"It's trickling in, about 10 doses a week," Mendenhall noted. She said CCCH is encouraging pregnant women to call the clinic or just walk in in the mornings, to receive a vaccine as soon as more is received.

CCCH Administrator Lola Jones said that might not be until mid-November, at which time she expects the H1N1 season to be completed.

In order of priority, Mendenhall said, after obstetrics cases, those receiving the H1N1 vaccine are patients under the age of 50 with compromised immune systems, asthma, pulmonary conditions and those receiving treatment for cancer.

Mendenhall said before a vaccination is given, staff will verify the patient's need for that vaccine.

Those not in the targeted group will have to wait until a later date to be vaccinated, according to Myra Stoney of Southwest Nebraska Health Department (SWNHD).

Mendenhall said staff at CCCH with direct patient contact have already received the H1N1 vaccine.

Stoney of SWNHD said 860 doses of H1N1 vaccine have been distributed in the eight-county area. The vaccine comes in two forms: live, attenuated intranasal vaccine and the inactivated injectable virus.

The vaccines don't prevent "influenza-like" illnesses caused by other viruses, nor do they prevent seasonal flu.

Jones said about 86 people had tested positive for influenza as of Tuesday. The type of flu isn't being differentiated, she said.

"We haven't tested everybody," she added, saying a lot of people aren't contacting the hospital or clinic if they have symptoms.

"This week we're having less people in to be tested than we have in the last 10 days," Jones concluded.

There were a lot of empty desks at Chase County Schools the past several weeks. At first the high school side was hit the worst, according to school nurse Angie Paisley. Next, the elementary side took the brunt.

"Pretty much the junior high-high school is on the down side, back to normal," Paisley said Friday. She was hoping the elementary side would be back to normal this week.

As of Oct. 20, there were 70 elementary students out with influenza, coughs, sore throats or stomach illness. By Friday, that number was at 46 absent, with only eight absent in the high

school.

Paisley said the influenza, either seasonal or H1N1, spread faster in the elementary school because, especially in kindergarten and first grade, “they have so much to remember that they forget to cough in their sleeve so it spreads more.”

Paisley also said children are being sent back to school too soon after having the flu.

“The parents need to keep them home until they are fever free for 24 hours without the use of ibuprofen,” she stressed. “They come back too soon and by 10, 11 a.m. they have a fever again. They’re too weak and tired” to be in school. “They need extra days for rest and recuperation.”

Four deaths from H1N1 have been reported to the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.

They include a woman from Lancaster County in her 60s with serious underlying health problems; a man from south central Nebraska in his 40s with chronic underlying health conditions including cardiac disease; a Sarpy County woman in her 50s with a blood disorder; and a fourth death Oct. 22 in Douglas County.