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Field Poll: Californians' concerns about getting the H1N1 virus vary widely

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October 6, 2009 - Throughout the year there has been a steady stream of highly publicized warnings that the new H1N1 influenza virus, also referred to as swine flu, could become a pandemic as the flu season begins this year.

Federal health officials have begun distributing a vaccine to the states this week. According to press reports, about 350,000 doses are being sent to California, with another 200,000 doses expected next week. The first batch is in the form of a nasal spray and will primarily be given to health care workers, emergency medical workers, young adults and children, as well as infants and their caretakers, who are at greater risk. Larger shipments of both the nasal spray and H1N1 flu shots will then follow in subsequent weeks for the broader public. Eventually 4.5 million doses of nasal spray and 18 million doses of flu shots are expected to be made available to the state. The federal government is picking up the tab to purchase the vaccines, although private clinics, pharmacies and other providers who will be distributing the vaccine can assess an administration fee of \$25 to recipients.

In a just completed statewide survey The Field Poll finds that Californians report widely varying levels of concern about becoming infected with the swine flu virus. Statewide 19% say they are very concerned, 32% somewhat concerned, 28% not too concerned and 21% not at all concerned about getting the virus. Latinos report significantly higher levels of concern than other racial and ethnic populations.

Two in three Californians (67%) are confident that the state public health system can respond effectively to an outbreak of the swine flu. About seven in ten (72%) say it is likely they would get vaccinated if doctors and public health officials recommend it, but 27% would not.

Concerns about getting the virus vary

Californians offer wide-ranging answers when asked how concerned they are that they or someone in their household will get the swine flu virus.

Overall, 51% express some degree of concern, with 19% very concerned and 32% somewhat concerned about getting the virus. However, another 49% say they are not too concerned (28%) or not at all concerned (21%).

Latinos express significantly higher levels of concern about getting the virus than other Californians, with 33% saying they are very concerned and 29% somewhat concerned. Women and blacks also report somewhat greater concern than others.

Most are confident that the state's public health system can respond effectively

About two in three voters (67%) are confident that the state's public health system can respond effectively to the anticipated outbreak of the swine flu virus, with 17% very confident and 50% somewhat confident. This compares to 30% who say they are not too confident (21%) or not at all confident (9%).

About seven in ten say they would likely get vaccinated if recommended by their doctor

A large majority of Californians (72%) says they would be very (46%) or somewhat (26%) likely to get vaccinated if doctors and public health officials recommended it. However, slightly more than one in four (27%) say they are not likely to get vaccinated even if recommended by doctors and public health officials.

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