

Local association works to provide H1N1 shots

Marci Shatzman

Palm Beach County western communities

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With this year's flu shot program behind her and 6,434 residents in 47 mostly adult communities safely inoculated, Joan Brunswick thought she could take a breather.

But then H1N1 happened, and Brunswick, who runs the annual flu shot program for the Coalition of Boynton West Residential Associations with Debbie Murphy, opted to extend the clinics when there's enough vaccine supply for seniors, who aren't on the government's priority list.

Now she has reservations for 9,700 H1N1 shots, and her program's on hold. It wasn't unexpected.

"We understand it's not available to us," she said. "Because [people] 65 and older are not at risk, we will be the last to get it, according to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention]."

Brunswick put together an H1N1 program quickly with their provider, Maxim Healthcare Services, and did an e-mail blast to the almost 90 communities that belong to COBWRA. The organization has run a seasonal flu shot program for eight years as a service to members. This year, it was held in 23 member communities that agreed to host clinics, which are staffed mostly by Maxim. It ran from Sept. 30 to Oct. 14.

"We really have it down to a science," she said.

Forty-six member communities responded to the H1N1 request for shots. Palm Isles alone has 939 reservations.

"We were asked to register our interested residents a couple of weeks ago, so they would have some idea of the numbers," e-mailed Aline Bricks, president of the master board in the development with 1,227 units and almost 2,000 residents. "Interestingly enough, more people registered than for the regular flu shot program. ... We made it possible to register in person or, if the resident was a seasonal, by phone."

Brunswick is relying on information from the CDC about how much vaccine is available.

In a press briefing on Nov. 6, the CDC verified her impression that the illness is mostly in younger people, and that more than half the hospitalizations are in people younger than 25 and 90 percent of the deaths are in people younger than 65.

"It's a flip-flop of what we see with seasonal flu," said Dr. Anne Schuchat, immunization director for the CDC. "If it all goes well, we are expecting about 8 million doses to be available in the week ahead."

Brunswick doesn't expect that supply to trickle down to seniors in [Palm Beach County](#) any time soon.

"We just have to be patient," she said. "Everyone, including the CDC, is frustrated."

Three of the communities waiting are family developments, and Brunswick advised them to call the county health department to see where the vaccine is available.

Both she and Bricks expect some drop-off if some seniors find the vaccine elsewhere. Bricks said she has a medical condition and can't wait.

"Not everyone who made reservations for our last flu shots on Oct. 4, for whatever reason, showed up," Bricks said.

As for the delay getting the H1N1 shots, "I do think people understand and feel lucky there's a possibility we may get it," she said. "I haven't gotten any flak."

Marci Shatzman covers the adult communities in the western suburbs of [Boca Raton](#), [Delray Beach](#), [Boynton Beach](#), Lake Worth and in [Wellington](#). You can read and comment on her recent columns at www.sunsentinel.com and reach her at granddame5@comcast.net.

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