2009 H1N1 Flu Alert

"Watch Out for the Fraud Bug!"

A Message for Medicare Beneficiaries

The vaccine for the 2009 H1N1 flu (also known as "swine flu") is different from the vaccine for the seasonal flu. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) wants you to get both vaccines. The supply of 2009 H1N1 vaccine is plentiful and now is available to everyone who wants it. The CDC says that although older people have been less likely to be infected by the H1N1 virus than younger people, severe infections and deaths from the 2009 H1N1 flu have hit every age group, including people 65 and older.

Besides protecting yourself from H1N1 flu infection, you should keep yourself safe from H1N1-related scams that could steal your identity, waste your money, or harm your health. Take a moment to read this brochure and fight off H1N1 fraud.

ASKING YOU TO PAY FOR THE H1N1 VACCINE--WHEN THE PROVIDER KNOWS THE VACCINE IS FREE--IS FRAUD.

You pay nothing for the 2009 H1N1 *vaccine.* Providers cannot bill Medicare or you for the H1N1 vaccine. The federal government is giving the vaccine to health care providers free of charge. If providers charge you for the H1N1 vaccine when they know they should not, that's fraud.

ASKING YOU TO COME IN FOR AN OFFICE VISIT--WHICH THE PROVIDER KNOWS IS NOT NECESSARY--IS FRAUD.

Medicare won't pay for an office visit if it is ONLY to get the H1N1 vaccine. To get Medicare to pay for an office visit, a doctor would have to bill Medicare for services that Medicare will cover. The question is: Do you need those services? Watch out when providers give the vaccine outside of the doctor's office but ask you to come into the office afterwards. Are they looking for a way to bill Medicare for an office visit when they know you really don't need to see a doctor? HOWEVER, if you think you are having a reaction to the vaccine--such as rash, dizziness, or hard time breathing--call your doctor right away. When you get your Medicare Summary Notice, look at the services Medicare paid for and make sure you actually received—and needed—the services.

CHARGING YOU MORE THAN WHAT THE PROVIDER KNOWS MEDICARE ALLOWS IS FRAUD.

You pay nothing for the *administration* of the H1N1 vaccine *if your doctor accepts assignment.* "Assignment" means that your doctor accepts Medicare's approved amount as full payment for the service of administering the H1N1 vaccine. You will have no out-of-pocket cost. However, if your doctor does not accept assignment or is not enrolled in Medicare, he or she may charge you for the *administration* of the vaccine—but only up to Medicare's fee schedule amount. The doctor still cannot charge you for the H1N1 vaccine.

SELLING YOU BOGUS TREATMENTS AND PRODUCTS TO CURE H1N1 FLU IS FRAUD.

Be careful when someone claims that a pill, air filtration device, inhaler, shampoo, or hand sanitizer will treat or cure the H1N1 flu virus. The only products the U.S. Food and Drug Administration recommends to treat the H1N1 flu are prescription antiviral drugs, including oseltamivir (brand name Tamiflu) and zanamivir (brand name Relenza). Web sites may be illegally marketing products that the Food and Drug Administration has not approved, cleared, or authorized. Go to the Federal Trade Commission's web site at www.ftc.gov for information and www.flu.gov for a list of fraudulent 2009 H1N1 influenza products.

MISLEADING YOU INTO GIVING OUT PERSONAL INFORMATION IS FRAUD.

Beware of scam artists that pretend to represent legitimate organizations. They may send you e-mail or set up counterfeit web sites about fake H1N1 vaccination programs in order to get your personal information. Don't give out your Social Security number, Medicare number, bank account number, or birth date.

PROTECT YOURSELF FROM H1N1-RELATED FRAUD

Get information about the H1N1 flu from reliable sources. Go to flu.gov or the Centers for Disease Control web site at cdc.gov/h1n1flu/. You also can call 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636) toll free. In Hawaii, visit the Department of Health's web site at flu.hawaii.gov or call 2-1-1. Know what Medicare will pay for and what your out-of-pocket costs might be by calling Medicare at 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227) or 1-877-486-2048 for TTY users. In Hawaii, you can call Sage PLUS, the State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP), in Honolulu at 586-7299 or 1-888-875-9229 toll free. TTY users should call 1-866-810-4379.

Report H1N1 fraud. Call Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP) Hawaii at 586-7281 or 1-800-296-9422 toll free. SMP Hawaii is a health care fraud prevention program funded by the U.S. Administration on Aging and based in the State of Hawaii Executive Office on Aging. Or call the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services fraud hotline at 1-800-HHS-TIPS (1-800-447-8477).

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This brochure is provided by SMP Hawaii and is supported in part by a grant from the Administration on Aging, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Grantees undertaking projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their findings and conclusions. Points of view or opinions do not, therefore, necessarily represent official Administration on Aging policy.

January 2010