

National Indian Health Board



The Red Feather Of Hope And Healing

Press Release
January 12, 2010
For Immediate Release

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Secretary Sebelius Urges American Indians and Alaska Natives to Get Flu Vaccination for H1N1

Washington, DC – “The virus has hit Indian Country especially hard,” said Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, during a press conference today announcing the release of new public service announcements (PSAs) developed to encourage American Indians and Alaska Natives to get the H1N1 vaccine.

The announcement coincides with National Influenza Week, January 10-16, 2010, which is a national observance to highlight the importance of continuing influenza vaccination. Last month, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released a study that estimated that the risk of dying from the H1N1 virus and its complications could be four times higher for American Indians and Alaska Natives than for the population in general.

Secretary Sebelius shared that Native communities suffer disproportionately from underlying health conditions (like asthma, diabetes, and heart disease) which may increase the risk of getting seriously ill from the flu; and also that poverty and difficulty in accessing medical care in remote communities increases the risk of serious illness and makes the risk of dying from that illness much higher.

“It’s really important for us to let people know how important it is to protect themselves from the flu. This message is really urgent in Indian Country. The new radio and TV Public Service Announcement is part of that outreach effort,” said Sebelius who shared that Wes Studi, American Indian Actor, stars in new PSAs that covers strategies that reduce the spread of the flu.

“We know that vaccines are by far the best means we have to prevent the flu. We’ve heard all the myths about vaccines being unsafe. That is absolutely not true and it’s really important at this critical time to set the record straight,” said Sebelius noting that every year millions of Americans are safely vaccinated against the seasonal flu.

During the press conference Dr. Yvette Roubideaux, Director of Indian Health Services (IHS), stated that all IHS areas are currently administering the H1N1 vaccine and the IHS meets weekly about H1N1. “All of our IHS Area Chief Medical Officers attend the weekly calls and are responsible for getting updated information out to local health facilities. There is also an every other week call for tribes to give them updates as well,” said Dr. Roubideaux.

Jessica L. Burger, RN, ADN, Deputy Director of the National Indian Health Board (NIHB) said, “NIHB is very pleased to see the elevation of this critical issue for Indian Country and the development of targeted messages for our communities. Indian Country’s population absolutely needs education regarding the severity of this disease along with increased availability of the vaccine to combat this devastating illness.”



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The National Indian Health Board applauds the commitment and timely response to the crisis mortality American Indian and Alaska Native populations are experiencing as a result of the H1N1 virus. “The ongoing efforts this Administration and Department of Health and Human Services’ outreach and education that is being done in Indian Country demonstrates the commitment President Obama has to improve Indian Health. As a registered nurse, I strongly encourage that every Indian person seeks and receives the H1N1 vaccine to protect themselves and their families,” said Burger, a registered nurse and former Health Director of the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians.

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The National Indian Health Board advocates on behalf of all Tribal Governments and American Indians/Alaska Natives in their efforts to provide quality health care. Visit www.nihb.org for more information.



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