Defense Department to start H1N1 flu virus vaccinations

By Jim Garamone, American Forces Press Service

All military personnel will be vaccinated against the H1N1 flu virus, and the vaccine will be available to all military family members who want it, according to Defense Department Health Affairs officials.

The H1N1 vaccination program will begin in early October, said Army Doctor Lt. Col. Wayne Hachey, director of preventive medicine for Defense Department Health Affairs.

The vaccine, which has been licensed by the Food and Drug Administration, will be mandatory for uniformed personnel. “What we want to do is target those people who are at highest risk for transmission,” Hachey said.

HM3 Glenn Gagarin from USNH Yokosuka prepares a patient for the influenza vaccine (flu shot) at Yokosuka Base. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, the single-best way to prevent seasonal flu is to get an annual vaccination. U.S. Navy file photo by MCSN Bryan Reckard

Health-care workers, deploying troops, those serving on ships and submarines and new accessions are at the top of the list. “Any place where we take a lot of people, squash them all together and get them nice and close and put them under stressful conditions will get the vaccine first,” he said.

According to Hachey, the department will use the usual seasonal flu vaccine distribution chain for the H1N1, noting that while the mass H1N1 vaccinations are new to the general population, the process for vaccinating against seasonal flu is old hat for the Defense Department. “We've been doing this for decades," he said. "The system is tried and true.”

The department initially will receive one million doses of the H1N1 vaccine and another 1.7 million doses later in October. Officials don't know yet whether people will need one dose or two. “The assumption right now is that people will need two doses, 21 days apart,” Hachey said. “That may change.”

FDA officials still are studying H1N1 and the vaccine, and the results should be known by the end of the month.

Hachey said that the seasonal flu vaccine is already available and the Defense Department will begin giving those shots shortly. “That has been our message to immunizers: to try and get as many people as they can immunized against the seasonal flu early,” he said.

Guidelines for giving priority to family members will follow those for the general population. “The Department of Health and Human Services is buying millions of doses of the vaccine. Installations are going to register with each state as an immunizer,” said Hachey. “They will tell how many people they care for. This includes dependents, retirees and so on.”

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) will place the order and will ship the vaccine where needed. Family members will have multiple opportunities to get the vaccine, whether at Defense Department medical facilities or off base.

The CDC has established target groups for those at greatest risk for transmitting or being affected by the H1N1. They include pregnant women, health-care workers, those younger than 25 or older than 65 and those with pre-existing health conditions.

Hachey said previous plans are serving the Defense Department well. “We have been preparing for pandemic flu because of its potential impact on the mission,” he said.

The symptoms of the H1N1 flu are almost the same as the seasonal flu: fever, sore throat, runny nose, nausea, muscle aches and feeling rundown. The 2009 H1N1 virus - formerly known as swine flu - is a pandemic virus, according to the World Health Organization. U.S. officials call the virus “troubling” and urge communities across the United States to take actions to mitigate the effects of it. The federal government is urging states and municipalities to begin preparing now for the fall flu season.

Task Group reviews, offers recommendations, analysis of NSPS

By Lisa Marsh, CNFJ Human Resources Office

This past May, the Deputy Secretary of Defense requested the Defense Business Board to form a task group to review the National Security Personnel System (NSPS) to help the department determine if the underlying design principles and methodology for implementation are reflected in the NSPS program objectives, whether the program objectives are being met and whether NSPS is operating in a fair, transparent and effective manner. The task group sought information from multiple sources to obtain a complete picture of the history, experience and issues with NSPS.

Additionally, the task group collected data from public comments solicited, interviews held with the United Defense Workers Coalition, interviews held with Department of Defense (DoD) stakeholders and with public meetings. The task group reviewed more than 900 submitted written comments. Two thirds of the submitted comments were from individuals currently in NSPS.

In their review of NSPS the task group offered the following recommendations and supporting analysis on policy and/or program changes:

• Initiate a reconstruction of NSPS that begins with a challenge to the assumptions and design of NSPS. A “fix” could not address the depth of the systemic problems discovered. The task group does not recommend an abolishment of NSPS because the performance management system that has been created is achieving alignment of employee goals with organizational goals. The reconstruction should include a true engagement of the workforce in designing needed changes and implementation. Finally, the reconstruction should include desired outcomes and data collection to measure results.

• Reestablish a DoD commitment to partnership and collaborating with employees through their unions.

• Establish a DoD commitment to strategic management and investment in career civil servants.

• Continue the existing moratorium on transitions of more work units into NSPS until DoD can present a corrective action plan to address identified issues, supported by data that the implemented corrective actions will address the identified issues.

• In relation to NSPS, the following areas of identified concerns must be addressed:

Pay pools. The overall process lacks transparency and is encumbered by extremely complicated sub-processes.

Pay bands. The pay bands have a wide impact and pay band two has a large component of the workforce without clear linkage to career progression.

Trust. Supervisors and employees have built up reserves of trust on mission performance but not on NSPS.

Best practices. DoD components have learned many best practices. These should be more formally collected and implemented across the department.

• Continued monitoring of NSPS implementation, with specific analysis of indicators of unintended Equal Employment Opportunity consequences in the NSPS workforce.

• Create a collaborative process for DoD managers and employees currently in the General Schedule (GS) system to design and implement a performance management system that ties individual employee performance goals to organizational goals. Explore the replacement of the current GS classification system.

As we near the end of this year’s performance cycle, the above recommendations will not affect our operations as we prepare for the pay pool cycle. Employees should understand that the findings and recommendations will be used to enhance the overall effectiveness of NSPS. All employees currently covered by NSPS will continue to follow existing NSPS regulations, policies and procedures.

New international dentist referral service for retirees

By Lora Sanders-VanNoy,
TRICARE Pacific Marketing Representative

The TRICARE Retiree Dental Plan (TRDP), which is administered by the Federal Services Division of Delta Dental of California, has contracted with AXA Assistance to provide TRDP enrollees with an international referral service for dental care outside the United States. With offices in more than 30 countries and the most comprehensive network of providers and correspondents, AXA can provide enrollees assistance in accessing more than 8,000 dental providers virtually anywhere in the world.

Collect-call numbers can be dialed from any country overseas 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. These numbers connect directly to highly trained, multi-lingual assistance coordinators who will gather all the necessary information to assist TRDP enrollees in finding a dentist overseas.

The phone numbers available for the Delta Dental international referral service are (312) 356-5971 or (312) 356-5972. Log on to www.trdp.org for more information about the TRICARE Retiree Dental Program.