

MSHA Safety Talks: H1N1 Flu (Week of September 14, 2009)

We had good news last week about the H1N1 flu though we shouldn't think the news is so good a problem won't be with us still.

The New England Journal of Medicine published a report last Thursday based on the first three weeks of a clinical trial of an H1V1 vaccine.

Healthy adults got one 15-microgram shot, and their blood was tested 21 days later. By that time, 97 percent of the 120 adults had enough antibodies to be considered protected. Another group that got 30-microgram doses had no greater protection.

There were no deaths or dangerous side-effects. Almost half of the participants reported sore arms or headaches, but that is normal with flu shots.

That means it should be possible to vaccinate — well before the flu's expected midwinter peak — all the 159 million people that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate are in the high-risk groups: pregnant women, people under 24 years old or caring for infants, people with high-risk medical conditions and health-care workers.

Barring production delays, the government hopes to have in hand 195 million doses by year's end. The first convincing trial results from a single 15-microgram dose in adults were published online Thursday afternoon by The New England Journal of Medicine. That trial was

done in Australia, but the vaccine maker, CSL Limited, is under contract to supply millions of doses to the United States government, and the president of the company's American subsidiary said he expected its trials here to have similar results.

The H1N1 swine flu pandemic has now reached 168 countries. It arrived in the United States late in the spring and infected more than one million people. It did not fade out as seasonal flu does, but persisted, especially in summer camps. Nearly 600 people had died by the end of August, according to the disease control agency.

Dr. Anthony S. Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, said trials now under way under the sponsorship of the National Institutes of Health were showing that adults who got only a single dose were protected within 8 to 10 days, which he said "corroborates and confirms the exciting data" from the Australian study. Robust protection produced so quickly in high-risk groups means lives will likely be saved, Dr. Fauci said.

