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Hundreds throng US clinic for H1N1 flu vaccine

Wed Oct 21, 2009 4:33pm EDT

ROCKVILLE, Maryland, Oct 21 (Reuters) - More than 1,700 people in search of H1N1 swine flu vaccine thronged the public health clinic in a Washington suburb on Wednesday, but in the end many at risk for severe infections were simply turned away.

The long lines support the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's assessment that Americans want the vaccine, despite some highly vocal critics who say they fear it may not be safe.

"They got in line as early as 10 o'clock last night. They were here at midnight. They were here at 5 a.m. The clinic started at 9 a.m.," said Montgomery County health officer Dr. Ulder Tillman.

But within 90 minutes, the clinic was out of the injectable vaccine needed by many of those most vulnerable to swine flu: pregnant women and children or adults with underlying health conditions including asthma.

"We are not able now to provide vaccine to pregnant women," Tillman told Reuters Television.

There was plenty of vaccine nasal spray from AstraZeneca's (AZN.L: [Quote](#), [Profile](#), [Research](#), [Stock Buzz](#)) MedImmune unit, which is not suitable for some high risk people because of its formulation using a live but weakened form of flu virus.

But health officials had only 249 doses of injectable vaccine because of manufacturing problems that have prompted the U.S. government to cut its production estimates for October from 40 million doses to between 28 million and 30 million.

U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius told Congress on Wednesday that those problems have been overcome and that production is expected to be back on track early in November.
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County spokeswoman Mary Anderson said local injectable vaccine supplies have been running significantly below expectations, perhaps by as much as 40 percent.

"The injectable vaccine we had is what we got last week. We haven't had anything new since then," she said.

The U.S. government has ordered up to 250 million doses of H1N1 vaccine from five companies: AstraZeneca, Sanofi-Aventis SA (SASY.PA: [Quote](#), [Profile](#), [Research](#), [Stock Buzz](#)), Novartis AG (NOVN.VX: [Quote](#), [Profile](#), [Research](#), [Stock Buzz](#)), GlaxoSmithKline PLC (GSK.L: [Quote](#), [Profile](#), [Research](#), [Stock Buzz](#)) and CSL Ltd (CSL.AX: [Quote](#), [Profile](#), [Research](#), [Stock Buzz](#)).

Flu vaccine is made using old technology that involves growing the virus in chicken eggs, and it takes months to make a new formulation to match circulating flu strains.

Makers of injectable vaccine have had more problems than expected getting vaccine doses from eggs. There have also been problems with new production lines set up to meet the orders.

In suburban Maryland, people said they wanted the protection now because H1N1 is already widespread and expected to intensify as colder weather sets in.

They came well-prepared for a long wait. Many dressed in layers against the October chill and brought snacks while some showed up with lawn chairs.

County officials expect to hold H1N1 clinics at public health offices every week and will soon begin vaccinations in local schools. (Reporting by [David Morgan](#); Editing by [Cynthia Osterman](#))

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