With the help of $5 million in new funding from the federal government, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment is making plans and strengthening its infrastructure ahead of the expected delivery of H1N1 vaccine into the state later this year. Part of the federal funding will flow directly to the state's hospitals so those facilities can prepare for H1N1 flu-related activities.

Based on early communication from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), it is expected a significant portion of the state's population will be advised to be vaccinated for the H1N1 flu.

In upcoming days and weeks, the Department of Public Health and Environment will issue a series of news releases focused on how residents can help stop the spread of flu viruses at home, work and school.

The first shipment of H1N1 vaccine is expected to arrive in Colorado as early as mid-October; however, it may be later, depending on when the vaccine production process is complete. While the categories of those to be vaccinated still are being considered, likely groups include school-age children, children who attend preschool or child care facilities, adults younger than 65 with chronic medical conditions, pregnant women and health-care workers.

Dr. Ned Calonge, chief medical officer at the Department of Public Health and Environment, said, "It's going to be important for residents to pay attention to public health messages this fall and winter, because there will be a lot of information about the two types of flu vaccines that are expected to be available. The information will assist residents with the plans they need to make for getting the vaccinations they need, and staying safe at home, school and work."

While seasonal flu vaccinations will be available at many sites as in years past, delivery and vaccination sites for the H1N1 vaccination still are being identified. Public health departments and schools are on the likely list of H1N1 vaccination sites thus far. It is expected the H1N1 vaccine, unlike the seasonal flu vaccine, will be made available to residents for free. Pricing for the seasonal flu vaccine is expected to remain close to previous years' costs.

“Getting your normal seasonal flu vaccination is as important as ever. We don’t want members of the public to get distracted by discussion of the H1NI virus and forget to make plans to receive their annual flu vaccination,” said Calonge.

This summer, much of the H1N1 news in Colorado has involved outbreaks at camps and other facilities with young people housed in close quarters. Outbreaks have occurred at a Pueblo-area Boy Scouts camp, the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs and a summer youth camp at the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley.

Calonge advised parents who are concerned about whether or not to send their children to summer camp to ask their childrens’ camp directors if they have taken the necessary steps to protect campers from the H1N1 virus. Those steps include screening for flu-like illness, sending home children who become sick and instituting rigorous hand-washing protocols.

He said, “If you know H1N1 is not circulating in your camp and your child isn’t suffering from a chronic illness, you should not worry about sending your child to camp. This is a time to plan and be prepared, and there are steps you can take to protect yourselves against the flu.”

In addition to getting vaccinated with the H1N1 vaccine, residents can protect themselves from H1N1 the way they protect themselves and others from seasonal influenza: wash their hands frequently, stay home from school and work when they are sick and cough into their sleeves instead of their hands. Residents with underlying health issues should talk to their doctors about additional steps they can take to remain safe from flu viruses, as they are at higher risk.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, specifically the assistant secretary of Preparedness and Response’s Division of Healthcare Preparedness Program, has awarded Colorado $1.4 million to be used to prepare for a possible pandemic influenza event this fall. The Department of Public Health and Environment’s Hospital Preparedness Program will manage this funding and is planning to distribute the monies to Colorado hospitals in an effort to help those facilities augment their infrastructures to better respond to the citizens of Colorado during a potential pandemic influenza outbreak.

The state health department will receive $4 million from a Public Health Emergency Response grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control

and Prevention. The purpose of this grant is to support the state and local public health infrastructure, including these measures:

—strengthening and sustaining the public health work force;

—increasing laboratory capacity and capability;

—strengthening disease surveillance activities;

—planning and implementing possible large-scale mass vaccination activities;

—developing and communicating effective public guidance to lessen the impact of the illness in communities;

—purchasing and procuring personal protective equipment, antivirals and other pandemic-related purchases for protecting the public health work force;

—training and educating of the public health work force;

—community and personal preparedness activities; and

—addressing gaps and other public health preparedness challenges related to public health preparedness and response to an influenza pandemic.

For more information on influenza vaccinations in Colorado, visit the Department of Public Health and Environment's Web site at www.cdphe.state.co.us. For information about H1N1,

visit www.flu.org.