

H1N1 vaccine coming to the Caribbean in November

Member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) are expecting the first shipment of the H1N1 vaccine to arrive in the region late November, as they prepare for further attacks from the H1N1 Virus otherwise known as, the swine flu.

The vaccine will provide immunisation for the Community's most vulnerable groups - children, pregnant mothers, persons suffering from Chronic Non-Communicable Diseases and young people - against an anticipated second attack of the H1N1 virus.

"The bad news is this virus is expected to intensify its attack during the colder months of December to January; the good news is that the Caribbean is more prepared to deal this virus the second time around as most Member States are seeking to acquire the vaccine," said Dr Rudolph Cummings, CARICOM Secretariat's Programme Manager, Health Sector Development.

The United States contributed significantly to a Global Fund which was used to develop the vaccine that could be delivered at no cost to some Member States. However, Dr Cummings pointed out that this was not enough and some countries that did not benefit from the Global Fund would have to buy additional doses. The costs he said would be kept to approximately US\$7 per vaccine.

"We have passed the panic stage," Dr Cummings asserted, "and for the majority who will be affected, the virus will just pass like the common flu."

According to Dr Cummings the approach to testing and treating the virus has changed since its first appearance in late May. He said that initially, tests were done for all flu like symptoms now it will be done in the public sector for severe acute respiratory infections.

Dr Cummings was one of three participants in a recent panel discussion titled Caribbean Connections, a new media product launched by the Guyana-based Internet Radio and Podcaster, Demerara Waves, and web cast to a New York audience through the New York based One Caribbean Radio. The programme is managed and moderated by Caribbean Journalist Denis Chabrol.