

More swine-flu shots given; program to continue

Vaccine clinics set for next three weeks

1:10 A.M. — The second round of free swine-flu vaccine clinics took place Monday, and the Lee County Health Department will continue the program the next three weeks. At the start of Monday's clinics, the department had about 14,000 vaccine doses on hand. Additional shipments will continue to arrive in the coming days and weeks.

No final tally was available on the number of people inoculated Monday at Fort Myers and Lehigh Senior high schools. This past Thursday, the department estimated about 3,300 were vaccinated in Fort Myers and Cape Coral. That figure was later revised down to 3,200 after public health officials finished their vaccine count last week.

Ultimately, health officials hope to vaccinate as many as 200,000 area residents.

"What we're hoping for is a steady stream," said Jennifer James-Mesloh, department spokeswoman.

The department got just that at Fort Myers High School. People began lining up as early as 2 p.m., and more than 400 were inoculated within the first hour there, James-Mesloh said.

Leslie Diplacido of Fort Myers brought her 3-year-old daughter shortly before 4 p.m.

Like many who have shown up at the clinics, Diplacido has heard the dire media reports of young people who have become gravely ill from the swine flu virus.

"That was enough for me to make sure she gets it," Diplacido said. "I wouldn't want that to happen to her."

Public health officials say that most people who contract the swine flu will not become seriously ill.

Jennifer Perkins of Fort Myers brought her 14-year-old son, Benjamin, to get vaccinated at Fort Myers High, where he's a student.

Perkins, a nurse, said she has seen how swine flu can affect kids.

"I've seen the sickest of the sickest of it," she said. "I don't want to go there with my own child."

Lehigh Senior didn't draw as many people seeking the vaccine as Fort Myers. An hour before the clinic opened, only 40 were waiting.

Bonnie Escher of Lehigh was there at 2:30 p.m.

"I felt this was the one to get. So many are getting sick, and not just in Florida," said Escher, who was waiting to get her first- ever flu shot.

Escher and Donna Lapatka, who came with Escher, were done within 15 minutes of the 4 p.m. start.

The health department is asking that only those at high risk of flu complications come to the clinics, at least for now. Most at risk include those between the ages of 6 months and 24 years, pregnant women, those who live with or care for children younger than 6 months old, health-care and emergency workers, and those between the ages of 25 and 64 with chronic health problems and/or weakened immune systems.

Val Arnold, a 59-year-old with chronic lung disease, said he decided to get inoculated at Fort Myers High because of his concerns about the severity of the swine flu, "and a letter from my doctor who said I'd be insane if I don't get a shot."

- Evangelia Ganosellis and Don Ruane contributed to this report.