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Jul 29, 2009 11:10 | Updated Jul 30, 2009 12:10

### PM orders swine flu vaccination purchase

By JUDY SIEGEL-ITZKOVICH

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Article's topics: Swine Flu, Yaakov Litzman

There is as yet no vaccine that protects against H1N1 "swine flu" virus, and Deputy Health Minister Ya'acov Litzman believes there won't be one available anywhere before the fall-winter regular flu season is under way. But Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, who met with Litzman on Wednesday evening, said he had "decided to order vaccines for all Israeli citizens."

The first trials of H1N1 flu vaccines have begun on healthy volunteers in Australia, where it is currently flu season. About 500 people are participating in the trials conducted by the CSL and Vaxine pharmaceutical companies. As soon as the vaccines are proven safe, they will go on the market.



Dr. Arkadi Ozerny with the swine flu test kit used at Ben-Gurion Airport to check passengers who visited Mexico in the past seven days, Sunday.  
Photo: Ariel Jerolimski

"This decision places Israel in line with the leading countries of the world on the issue of future supplies of influenza vaccines," Netanyahu said in a statement. "In this context, it is important to emphasize that H1N1 vaccines are still undergoing development and are not yet 'on the shelf.' The vaccines will be delivered to various countries, including Israel, only after the conclusion of development in a few months."

Meanwhile, a 38-year-old pregnant woman suffering from swine flu was admitted to intensive care at Hadassah University Hospital in Jerusalem's Ein Kerem on Wednesday night.

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he is the second pregnant woman to have contracted swine flu in Israel. Pregnant women re in the high-risk category of those diagnosed with the virus.

ue to public nervousness about the first death in Israel from H1N1 flu this week, the prime inister also insisted that the Health Ministry increase by 5 percent its supply of anti-viral edications such as Tamiflu, even though the state already stores higher rates of these rugs than the average European country. Such drugs can reduce complications among eople at high risk who contract influenza but are useless as preventative medicine, and ey are not prescribed lightly because they can cause unpleasant side effects.

he cost of the vaccines and anti-virals ill reach NIS 450 million.

etanyahu instructed the Prime Minister's ffice director-general Eyal Gabai to work ith Finance Minister Yuval Steinitz and itzman on finding sources of financing, nd to submit a proposal to an upcoming abinet meeting. Litzman strongly oposes the Treasury Budgets Division's ew that these should be paid for with the ore than NIS 400m. allocated to expand e basket of lifesaving and life-improving rugs for 2010.

arlier on Wednesday, Litzman said that he did not believe the purchase was necessary, as e antidote was currently not fully ready. However, he admitted that professionals in his inistry were in favor of the acquisition in light of their prediction that one in four Israelis ould contract swine flu over the winter.

peaking on Army Radio, Litzman maintained that Tamiflu was sufficient for dealing with e spreading epidemic.

There is currently no vaccination going on in Israel," Litzman said.

We would be prepared to invest a lot of funds into it, but there is simply no need. And esides, by the time the vaccination would arrive, the winter will already have passed."

le addressed fears within the professional ranks of his office, like the worry that if Israel oes not hurry up and order the vaccination, the stock will be exhausted by orders placed y other Western countries.

There is no point in putting money into a vaccination without definite knowledge of its fficiency. While the assessment that many people will contract the virus in the winter may ove correct, there is no need to worry - there are antidotes, and the illness is mild," he aid.

In Monday, the Health Ministry announced the first patient to die of complications of the 1N1 virus in Israel.

himon Azran, 35, an obese smoker, died at Yoseftal Hospital in Eilat over the weekend.

o far, about 1,500 cases - around 30 or 40 new cases a day - have been reported in rael. Others have gone unreported, with people who feel unwell just staying home and not oing to their doctors.

itzman's ministry is planning a public education campaign for the autumn to reduce revalence of the flu and to encourage vaccination against conventional influenza, which ould combine with H1N1 virus.

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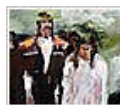
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