

US swine flu vaccine outlook improving, CDC says

October 27 2009, By MIKE STOBBE , AP Medical Writer

(AP) -- More than 22 million doses of swine flu vaccine are available now, and most Americans should soon find it easier to get their dose, U.S. health officials said Tuesday.

"We're beginning to get to significant increases in the availability," said Dr. Thomas Frieden, director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, at a briefing.

Last week there were just 14 million doses on hand, despite predictions that as many as 120 million doses would be ready by mid-October. The slow supply trickle has frustrated Americans, who have stood in line for hours in some parts of the country.

The shortage has probably increased demand, Frieden said.

"It's quite likely that that too little vaccine is one of the things that's making people more interested in getting vaccinated, frankly. When we have shortages, we see an increase in demand," he said.

The vaccine is grown in eggs in a reliable but slow process, and smaller amounts of it were being produced per egg than expected. There were other snags, too, but health officials say manufacturers have overcome most of those and are making the vaccine more speedily.

The government has ordered 225 million doses.

CDC officials estimate that the swine flu virus, first identified in April, has killed at least 1,000 Americans and caused at least mild illness in many millions of others.

The pandemic started in a frightening burst of cases in certain parts of the country, including New York, Boston and parts of the Southwest. Illnesses diminished somewhat in the summer and then began increasing across the country as schools reopened roughly two months ago.

Swine flu cases are waning in Georgia and some parts of the country lately, but still increasing in others. Health officials say it's hard to predict what will happen in the next few months.

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