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WASHINGTON (Army News Service, Sept. 2, 2009) -- Soldiers and families can expect to get two flu shots this year.

In addition to the conventional flu shot administered each fall, the H1N1 or "Swine Flu" vaccine should be available by mid-October, said Col. Deborah Knickerbocker, chief of Emergency Preparedness and Response, the Office of the Surgeon General and Army Medical Command.

Knickerbocker spoke during the Army Emergency Management Conference, Sept. 1, at the Pentagon. The conference coincided with the start of National Preparedness Month.

Getting flu shots, in addition to taking measures to prevent exposure to the virus or spreading the virus is part of preparedness, Knickerbocker said. And it is important to maintaining mission readiness.

"When Soldiers and family members take care of themselves and prepare, they not only help the Army be more resilient, they help the local communities they are in be more resilient," she said.

"There's going to be vaccine, and there's going to be enough to go around," Knickerbocker said. "Everybody is going to get their shots."

Knickerbocker said the H1N1 vaccine will be distributed to Soldiers, families and other beneficiaries mostly through primary care providers.

"They'll get their seasonal shots, and the H1N1 shot, as soon as they become available," Knickerbocker said.

Along with the vaccinations, Knickerbocker recommends a number of common-sense measures to prevent the spread of H1N1.

"Just teaching people about how easy it is to prevent disease by washing our hands, and cough- and sneeze-hygiene and etiquette, it's pretty simple," she said. "Part of what we need to do is instill in the culture of the military -- which does not really usually think this way -- to stay home when you are sick.

If you go to work sick, you'll make office mates sick, or squad mates."

The H1N1 virus has made headlines because it's a "novel" virus, Knickerbocker said.

"We haven't seen the virus before. And when we have a virus that people have not been exposed to before, we have no immunity to it," Knickerbocker said.

Many of the deaths from H1N1 occurred in Mexico, and in those already immuno-compromised, so the virus gained notoriety, Knickerbocker said. But the effects of the virus have not been what was expected -- not even as bad as seasonal flu.

"The message has been sent out there that this particular virus is not as virulent as we had been planning for with the H5N1, not as virulent as the seasonal flu," she said. "And seasonal influenza kills about 36,000 in this country each year."

Knickerbocker said that while Soldiers can expect to get vaccinated for both the seasonal flu and the H1N1 flu virus, the Army does not expect the H1N1 to have damaging effects on the Army.

"I don't think the Army is worried about this particular H1N1 virus. If it stays at the level of severity that it is now, which it is mild, it should have no more effect on operations than the seasonal flu does," she said. "But we have to take care during flu season to try to prevent getting ill, and staying home if we are ill, to prevent operational impact."