

WHO to give free H1N1 vaccines to the Pacific

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The World Health Organisation office in Fiji has confirmed it will begin distributing free swine flu vaccines next month.

The office says it's currently waiting on the H1N1 flu vaccines to arrive from donor countries, and will then begin shipping them around the region.

It is hoped that there will be enough of the vaccine to be provided free of charge to about ten percent of Pacific Islanders.

However, the World Health Organisation's Representative to the South Pacific, Doctor Ken Chen, told Radio Australia's Pacific Beat program, that they will not know the exact number of vaccines available until next month.

"There are a lot of logistical issues in dealing with receiving the vaccines from donors," he said.

"They're distributed to all the countries. As I understand it, Pacific Islands are among the list of the first shipments so we hope we will get the vaccine...in December this year."

Priorities

Mr Chen says those on high on the WHO's priority list will be the first to receive the vaccine.

"We'll work with each country to prepare the priority list, and it is strongly recommended that the health workers should receive the vaccine."

"Of course then the other group, including the pregnant women and kids and those who have a chronic condition," he said.

While there have been no new cases of swine flu in the Pacific, Mr Chen says WHO will continue to monitor the situation.

"In Fiji recently we don't have any new cases and we also don't have any new cases in other Pacific Island countries," he said.

"But you look at the news from the northern hemisphere and there are several countries that have a lot of new cases now. So globally the second wave is already there."

"We are closely monitoring the situation in those countries." © ABC