

ONEIDA COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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State Cites Oneida County Health for H1N1 Response

The Oneida County Health Department overcame numerous obstacles including an evolving epidemic and the pressure to deliver medications that were sometimes in short supply in its efforts to protect the public health during the H1N1 influenza pandemic, according to a letter from Dr. Richard F. Daines, Commissioner of Health for the State of New York. An accompanying certificate compares the local health department's efforts to those of 'Balto,' the legendary sled dog credited with braving treacherous waters and an Arctic blizzard to deliver life-saving diphtheria antitoxin to the residents of Nome, Alaska during the winter of 1925.

"Like 'Balto', you have proved yourselves on the trail despite multiple obstacles," Daines' letter says in part, a reference to the dog's ability to travel 600 miles in whiteout conditions along the Iditarod trail. Publicity from the dog's feat helped spur an inoculation campaign in the United States which greatly reduced the threat of diphtheria and has been immortalized in books, movies and the famous statue of 'Balto' in New York City's Central Park. The Iditarod Dog Sled Race commemorates 'Balto's' 1925 serum run.

"I take pride in the performance of the health department during the H1N1 influenza threat. Despite the tragic loss of several Oneida County residents due to the influenza, the impact H1N1 had on our community was minimized through an aggressive and effective campaign of public education, public vaccination and our mass school immunization program," Oneida County Executive Anthony J. Picente, Jr. said.

As part of the County's response to the H1N1 outbreak that began in April, 2009 more than 20 public clinics were held at which approximately 7-thousand doses of H1N1 vaccine were administered. Additionally, more than 9-thousand doses of H1N1 vaccine were administered to students at 102 clinics in the County's 19 school districts as part of the school mass immunization program. Oneida County also established a 24/7 toll free "Influenza Hotline."

In his letter to Acting Director of Health Daniel W. Gilmore, Daines went on to say that the local health department was key to the overall response to this public health emergency and that a continuing partnership between the State and the local health department will be critical in responding to future health crises.

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