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Health Department

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Novel H1N1 Influenza

August 26, 2009

What is H1N1 Influenza (flu)?

H1N1 (referred to initially as "swine flu") is a new flu virus causing illness in people. This new virus was first detected in people in the United States in April 2009. Other countries have reported people sick with this new virus.

How does H1N1 Flu spread?

This virus is spreading from person-to-person, probably in much the same way that regular seasonal influenza viruses spread. Flu viruses are spread from person to person mainly through coughing or sneezing by people with influenza. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

Who's at greatest risk?

Those at greatest risk include:

- Pregnant women,
- Children age 6 months to 24 years old
- People age 25-64 years with health conditions that compromise their immune systems..

Individuals who fit into these groups are encouraged to be vaccinated for H1N1 when vaccine is available.

Additionally, people who fit in the following groups are also highly encouraged to be vaccinated as soon as possible:

- Household contacts and caregivers for children younger than 6 months of age
- Healthcare and emergency medical services personnel

What are the symptoms of H1N1 Flu?

The symptoms of H1N1 flu virus in humans are similar to the symptoms of seasonal flu and include:

- Fever greater than 100 degrees
- Body aches
- Coughing
- Sore throat
- Respiratory congestion
- In some cases, vomiting and diarrhea

What should I do if I have these symptoms?

Individuals with the above symptoms should contact their physician, especially if you have underlying medical conditions. Your physician will determine whether testing or treatment is needed. If you are experiencing flu-like symptoms, you should stay home and avoid contact with other people.

Are there medicines to treat the H1N1 Flu?

Antiviral drugs can be used to treat H1N1 to make the illness milder and the duration shorter. They may also prevent serious influenza complications. Antiviral drugs work best when started within two days of illness onset. Antiviral drugs should still be considered after 2 days of symptom onset for hospitalized patients or people at high risk for influenza-related complications. Since antiviral medications are a limited resource and overuse could lead to the virus being resistant to the medication, their use should be reserved for those who are extremely ill or who are at greater risk for complications.

What can I do now to reduce the risk of illness?

As with any influenza virus, individuals are encouraged to practice *good hygiene habits*.

You can help stop germs from spreading.

- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Stay home when you are sick to avoid spreading illness to co-workers and friends.
- Cough or sneeze into your elbow or a tissue and properly dispose of used tissues.

What do I do if I have flu symptoms?

Avoid attending school, work or other areas of mass gatherings until 1 day after flu symptoms stop (without the use of fever-reducing medications). Family members who do not have symptoms can continue to attend school, work or other community gatherings.

If you work in a health care setting, you should not go back to work for 7 days from the start of your symptoms *or* 1 day after the resolution of symptoms, whichever is longer. For additional information, visit:

<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/groups.htm>

What else can I do?

- Stay healthy by eating a balanced diet, drinking plenty of water and getting adequate rest and exercise.
- Monitor your stress level. If you feel overwhelmed, seek help: COMCARE of Sedgwick County, 660-7540 or the Crisis Help Line, 660-7500.



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Why should I monitor stress?

When facing a new situation, it is not unusual to feel a certain amount of stress. Here are some tips:

- Balance the need for information with the stress that may come from overexposure to media presentations about the illness.
- Be aware of your feelings and talk to others about your concerns, especially if you are feeling overwhelmed by these events.
- Remember children do not think about things in the same way adults do. They may have fears about what they see and hear because they do not understand.
- Limit children's exposure to disturbing information.
- For more information on how to talk to your children about H1N1 you can go to www.sedgwickcounty.org/healthdept/panflu.asp.

Above all, stay informed and stay aware. Check the Sedgwick County Web site often for local updates. You can also call 2-1-1 for more information.

Can people catch H1N1 Flu from eating pork?

No. H1N1 Influenza viruses are not transmitted by food. You can not get the H1N1 virus from eating pork or pork products. Eating properly handled and cooked pork and pork products is safe.