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Health officials advise on home care for those sick with novel H1N1 flu

- Most cases of novel H1N1 flu can be cared for at home -

[PENSACOLA] – With the potential for cases of novel H1N1 flu to increase in Escambia County (FL), health department officials are advising residents that most people who become sick with novel H1N1 flu can be cared for at home. If the sick individual gets worse or shows the emergency medical warning signs listed below, they should call their physician for additional guidance.

“We want to keep people well until the vaccine becomes available, so it’s important to know how to care for a sick person without getting the rest of the family sick,” said Escambia County Health Department Director Dr. John Lanza. “Fortunately, most people sick with H1N1 flu will recover by caring for themselves at home.”

Emergency warning signs in children are the following and require urgent medical attention: fast breathing or trouble breathing; bluish or gray skin color; not drinking enough fluids; severe or persistent vomiting; not waking up or not interacting; being so irritable that the child does not want to be held; and, flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough.

Emergency warning signs in adults are the following and require urgent medical attention: difficulty breathing or shortness of breath; pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen; sudden dizziness; confusion; severe or persistent vomiting; and, flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough.

Isolate sick person within the home

When caring for a sick person in the home, keep the sick person away from other family members. Sick family members should **not** take care of infants who are well. Avoid having pregnant women care for the sick person.

Family members with a high risk for complications from influenza should avoid close contact of the sick person by staying six or more feet away. People with a high risk of complications from influenza are the elderly, young children, pregnant women, people with weakened immune systems, and those with underlying medical conditions such as asthma or diabetes.

Stay home for at least 24 hours after fever is gone, except to seek medical care or for other necessities. (Fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.)

Limit the spread in your home

To keep H1N1 flu from spreading to others in your home, follow this guidance:

- Have the sick person cover their cough with a disposable tissue. Throw the tissue away after each use. They should wash their hands frequently with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub.

- Have everyone in the household wash their hands often.
- Ask your physician if household contacts (in the high-risk groups) of the sick person—particularly those contacts who may be pregnant or have chronic health conditions—should take antiviral medications to prevent the flu.

Put sick person in separate room

Placing the sick person in a separate room in the home can help contain the spread of disease. Follow this guidance:

- Keep the sick person in a room separate from the common areas of the house.
- Keep the door to the sick room closed. Have the sick person use a separate bathroom, if possible.
- Clean the sick person's bathroom daily with household disinfectants.
- If the sick person must share a bathroom with well family members, use disposable paper towels for drying hands. If you cannot use paper towels, have each family member use their own towel. Do not share towels with the sick person.
- If the sick person needs to leave the home for medical care, they should wear a face mask, if available.
- The sick person should not have visitors other than caregivers. A phone call is safer than a visit.

Keeping the caregiver well

If you are the caregiver, these tips can help you stay well.

- Avoid being face-to-face with the sick person.
- When holding small children who are sick, place their chin on your shoulder so that they will not cough in your face.
- Wash your hands often especially after you touch the sick person or handle used tissues, or laundry.
- If the caregiver is in a high-risk group, talk to your physician about taking antiviral medication to prevent the caregiver from getting the flu.
- If a person who is at a high risk for complications from influenza cannot avoid close contact with a sick person, they should talk with their doctor about the need to wear a facemask, if available, when caring for the sick person.
- Monitor yourself and household members for flu symptoms and contact the Florida Department of Health telephone hotline at: 1.877.352.3581 or your physician, if symptoms occur.

Additional information on homecare, including medications that help lessen the symptoms of flu, are at www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidance_homecare.htm

Additional information on what to do if you have flu-like symptoms are at www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/sick.htm

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