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## COUNTY OF INYO

### **2009 H1N1 Influenza Update by Health Officer, Richard Johnson, MD (formerly known as Swine Infuenza) Thursday April 30, 2009, 9 PM**

You know it was a slower day when experts start arguing about the name. Well, it looks like the pork industry had its way, as the bug causing this outbreak has been renamed. This is just to emphasize again that this has nothing to do with eating pork or handling pigs!

#### **CURRENT STATUS**

There are no confirmed cases of 2009 H1N1 influenza in the Eastern Sierra. Public Health continues to investigate possible cases and monitor the level of illness in the region; for example, tracking the number of patient visits and hospitalizations for influenza-like illness. We do not believe that EMS, clinics, and hospitals in our area are seeing a surge of illness that would be worrisome. To date, illness from the 2009 H1N1 flu in the U.S. has been mild to moderate; most infections have resolved without complications. The numbers of new cases continue to increase around the state, country, and world, with more and more geographic areas affected. Latest official numbers can be found at the Web sites mentioned at the end.

#### **PERSPECTIVE**

Every day that goes by without a steep increase in the number of hospitalizations or deaths is a blessing. We are grateful that the illnesses seem to be rather benign outside of the cluster in Mexico. But let us not become complacent. In each of the four major pandemics since 1889, a spring wave of relatively mild illness was followed by a second wave a few months later of a much more serious disease. This was true in 1889, 1957, 1968, and in the catastrophic Spanish flu of 1918, which affected a third of the world's population, and effortlessly killed 50 million people.

The good news from past experience is the majority of deaths have happened not in the first wave, but later, giving us time to possibly produce a vaccine. At this time, companies are awaiting the viral reference strain and materials needed to get production off the ground. There are likely to be competing vaccines. It appears it is too late to combine this 2009 H1N1 strain into the 2009-10 seasonal influenza vaccine, so we will be faced with 3-4 shots come fall. Production of Tamiflu and Relenza is also in high gear.

#### **KEY PREVENTION TIPS**

- Stay home if you are sick.
- Wash your hands often.
- Cover your cough.
- Avoid touching your face (eyes, nose and mouth).

#### **DON'T PRESCRIBE OR REQUEST TAMIFLU FOR ROUTINE ILLNESSES**

Incorrect and overuse of antivirals is dangerous and can lead to antiviral resistance. Remember:

- Tamiflu® (oseltamivir) can't effectively treat all current seasonal flu strains.
- Seasonal flu is still circulating.
- Many other illnesses have similar symptoms as flu (fever, cough, fatigue), but are not flu.

## **KEEP EMERGENCY ROOMS AND HOSPITALS FREE TO TREAT SERIOUS ILLNESSES!**

- People with mild illnesses should not go to ERs or hospitals for treatment.
- Most people with flu-like illness will get better without the need to see a doctor or take special medications.

## **DON'T GIVE ASPIRIN TO CHILDREN FOR FLU SYMPTOMS**

- Over-the-counter cold and flu medications used according to package instructions may help lessen symptoms but will not lessen how infectious a person is. These medicines might make feel better, but you can still spread germs.
- Don't use medication that contains aspirin (acetylsalicylic acid) because it can cause a rare but serious illness called Reye's syndrome.
- Take medicines **without** aspirin, such as:
  - Acetaminophen (Tylenol®)
  - Ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®, Nuprin®)
  - Naproxen (Aleve®)
- Don't give children younger than age 2 any over-the-counter cold medications without first speaking with a doctor. Safest care includes using a cool-mist humidifier and a suction bulb to help clear away mucus.

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **The pandemic phase level was raised to 5. What does that mean, should I be concerned?**

Phase 5 describes how clusters of cases have been found in several countries around the world and that the illness is likely to spread. However, this description does not reflect the current situation in Mono or Inyo County. As of Thursday, April 30, **NO** confirmed cases have been identified. The change in phase level does stress the importance of doing your best to reduce the spread of illness in our communities: stay home if you are sick, wash your hands often, cover your coughs, and avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.

### **How do I know if I have swine flu?**

The symptoms of swine flu are the same as those for regular flu: fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, chills, headache, and fatigue. Some cases also have had vomiting and diarrhea.

### **How do I keep from getting swine flu?**

Prevention recommendations are the same as seasonal flu: wash your hands often, avoid close contact with people who are sick, avoid touching your face (eyes, nose, and mouth).

### **What should I do if I have flu-like symptoms?**

Anyone that is sick (fever, cough sore throat) should stay home—not just now, but always! If you are sick, do not return to work or school until 1 or 2 days after symptoms end.

### **Should I be tested for swine flu?**

The Public Health Department recommends testing only for people experiencing severe symptoms (hospitalized illness) or for those with flu-like symptoms and known exposure to another swine flu case or recent travel to an area with cases (i.e., Mexico).

### **Should I buy medicines to treat flu?**

Antiviral medications should be taken only under the guidance of a medical doctor since medicines can have side effects, especially if they are not taken correctly. It is important to remember that most flu-like illness resolves without the need to see a doctor or to take medication (besides basic over-the-counter

medicines to reduce fever and make you feel better). It is also important to remember that many other illnesses cause flu-like symptoms—and if your illness is not caused by the flu, flu antivirals will not make you better. In addition, regular seasonal flu is still circulating in and some of these viruses are resistant (cannot be treated effectively) with Tamiflu. Incorrect and overuse of antivirals is not only dangerous, but can also lead to further viral resistance.

### **What are more serious signs of flu illness?**

While to date most swine flu cases in the U.S. have been mild to mild, and in general people with flu-like illness will get better without complications, seek medical care if you experience any of these more severe symptoms:

#### **For children:**

- If flu-like symptoms do not get better after a few days or become worse
- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Dehydration; not able to drink enough fluids
- Not waking up, not interacting; Confusion, being disoriented
- Fever with a rash

#### **For adults:**

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting

### **911 is not for health information!**

Keep emergency lines free.

### **How do I care for someone with flu-like illness?**

The same as always: provide water or other fluids, and watch to see if symptoms get worse or do not resolve. Many basic over-the-counter medications can reduce fever and make people feel better.

Precautions to limit the spread of flu-like illness when caring for someone are the same as what you should do for regular colds and flu:

- Limit contact with the sick person and avoid close contact (kissing, hugging)
- Do not share personal hygiene items (toothbrushes, towels)
- Wash your hands often

### **Should I keep my child out of school?**

No. There are no confirmed cases of swine flu in the Eastern Sierra. Children that are sick should stay at home until better—not just now, but always.

### **Can people who have just come from Mexico be allowed to return to school or work?**

We do not recommend restricting people from any public events or interaction simply due to recent travel to affected areas, even Mexico. Thousands of people travel to and from Mexico daily, and quarantine recommendations for these people have not been enacted by local, state or federal agencies. For this outbreak, we are beyond containment and now focusing on limiting the number of cases. Instead, ALL people should monitor their health.

Everyone should avoid all public activities if they are sick; and not just now, but always. Instead of singling out people who have traveled to Mexico, focus should be on identifying those with flu-like symptoms (fever, cough, fatigue, etc.). This is a great opportunity for schools and businesses to stress the importance of staying home when sick, and basic respiratory hygiene practices (wash your hands, cover your cough, etc).

**Should I wash surfaces to avoid getting sick with swine flu?**

Germs can spread when a person touches something that's contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth. Cleaning common surfaces can help kill germs and reduce infections, but it's not practical or possible to clean surfaces continuously. Know the best way to avoid getting the flu does not include wearing a mask, or special cleaning procedures beyond normal processes. Instead, wash your hands, avoid touching your face, cover your cough, and stay home if you're sick to keep others well.

**Where can I get more information?**

As part of the effort to provide updated information to Californians on what they can do to protect themselves and their families from the swine flu outbreak, the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) has activated a toll-free swine flu hotline in English and Spanish. Assistance in other languages is also available. The phone number is 1-888-865-0564.

**CDPH's swine flu hotline is available Monday through Friday, from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., and on weekends from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.**

<http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/>

<http://ww2.cdph.ca.gov/HEALTHINFO/DISCOND/Pages/SwineInfluenza.aspx>

<http://www.countyofinyo.org/publichealth/>