



SOUTHWEST PUBLIC HEALTH DISTRICT

1109 North Jackson Street
Albany, Georgia 31701-2022
(229) 430-4599 Fax (229) 430-5143 Emergency 888-430-4590
www.southwestgeorgiapublichealth.org

July 29, 2009

For Immediate Release

Contact: Carolyn Maschke, Public Information Officer

229-430-1969, 229-357-0257; cwmaschke@dhr.state.ga.us

Southwest Health District investigates two Influenza A clusters involving children

In response to separate Influenza A outbreaks involving children in two of its 14 counties, Southwest Health District has partially reactivated its Pandemic H1N1 Emergency Operations Center and stepped up surveillance and education efforts in the region.

“We are monitoring what appear to be Influenza Type A clusters in Dougherty and Lee counties,” said Southwest Health District Deputy Director Brenda Greene. “One of the clusters is associated with attendance at a summer program, while the other is associated with a church-related trip. Any time clusters of disease occur, we are concerned. When the clusters involve children our level of concern grows even more.”

Public Health is working closely with the organizations, parents and other healthcare providers to provide guidance and assistance in prevention, control and treatment of the disease, Greene said.

“While these are the first such Influenza A outbreaks we have seen in our District, Pandemic H1N1 (a strain of Influenza A) clusters are becoming common in summer camps and programs elsewhere in Georgia and across the country,” added Southwest Health District Health Director Dr. Jacqueline Grant. “Unfortunately, we expect to see more people, including more children, fall ill, possibly require hospitalization and perhaps even die as the pandemic progresses. Southwest Georgia residents need to be aware of that and prepare, especially when students begin returning to school in the days ahead.”

Public Health disease investigators learned this week that 20 out of 40 students enrolled in a Dougherty County summer program had fallen ill with flu-like symptoms, including two children with confirmed cases of Influenza A, Greene said.

On Monday, the Dougherty County summer program director voluntarily discontinued the program.

Baker	Calhoun	Colquitt	Decatur	Dougherty	Early	Grady
Lee	Miller	Mitchell	Seminole	Terrell	Thomas	Worth

At the same time, a cluster of 40 youngsters who had attended a youth-oriented conference was reported in Lee County, Greene said. Ten of the Lee County young people are experiencing flu-like symptoms, with two having confirmed cases of Influenza A.

“Pandemic H1N1 is now so prevalent that we are assuming anytime we see flu-like illness it is the pandemic virus, especially if initial tests confirm the presence of Influenza A,” said Greene, explaining that Pandemic H1N1 is a strain of Influenza A.

“Also, we know that the pandemic has a high attack rate among children, teens and young adults. That makes it even more likely that we are dealing with Pandemic H1N1 when we see clusters in children. Therefore, even though we do not have confirmation that the clusters in Dougherty and Lee are H1N1, we are operating under the assumption that they are,” Greene said.

Grant emphasized that the Dougherty County summer program’s director made a voluntary decision to discontinue the program.

“At this time, Public Health is following the Centers for Disease Control guidelines, which don’t call for closure of camps, schools or children’s programs with confirmed or suspected cases of H1N1. That’s different from what was recommended early in the outbreak, when we didn’t know how severe the virus was.”

Now, however, data shows most people who catch Pandemic H1N1 experience mild to moderate illness. “So we are going with the same recommendation for Pandemic H1N1 that we make for seasonal flu: Unless so many counselors or so many students are sick that the program can’t operate, there’s no need to cancel the program,” explained Grant.

However, she warned, recommendations could change again – rapidly – should the virus change and become more dangerous. “Influenza is extremely unpredictable. We know the virus mutates. Our concern is that it will begin causing more severe illness or that it will become drug resistant. It is vitally important that the public stays informed and prepared,” Grant said.

Because of the rapid spread of Pandemic H1N1, the World Health Organization, the CDC, and now the State of Georgia no longer count and report cases. The focus now is on severity of illness, Grant said.

Baker	Calhoun	Colquitt	Decatur	Dougherty	Early	Grady
Lee	Miller	Mitchell	Seminole	Terrell	Thomas	Worth

“Although work is moving ahead on a vaccine for this new virus, it is not yet available and is unlikely to be available until mid-October. We cannot stop this pandemic, so our best line of defense is to slow its spread and to be prepared to care for cases of mild to moderate flu at home,” she said.

Influenza is thought to spread mainly through the coughs and sneezes of those infected. The main symptoms of Pandemic H1N1 Influenza are fever plus at least either a cough or sore throat. Additional symptoms associated with it include headache, tiredness, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, chills, diarrhea and vomiting.

Additional information on Pandemic H1N1, including homecare for patients with H1N1, is available online at www.southwestgeorgiapublichealth.org and www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/.

###

Baker	Calhoun	Colquitt	Decatur	Dougherty	Early	Grady
Lee	Miller	Mitchell	Seminole	Terrell	Thomas	Worth