



## SOUTHWEST PUBLIC HEALTH DISTRICT

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May 8, 2009

**For Immediate Release**

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### **Public Health remains alert, but H1N1 Emergency Operation Center scales back**

Southwest Health District today announced it was partially deactivating the Emergency Operation Center it opened late in April to respond to the national Swine Flu H1N1 outbreak. However Public Health will continue to keep a close eye on the new virus, said Southwest Health District Health Director Dr. Jacqueline Grant.

“If the situation changes, we will return to full activation. But for now, we will follow the state’s lead in scaling back our level of emergency operations,” Grant said. “The change in operational status does not mean we are dropping our guard. The H1N1 virus has claimed two lives in the United States and sickened many others, and we take it seriously. Fortunately, however, the majority of cases have resulted in mild illnesses.”

She noted that the number of positive H1N1 cases in Georgia has not shown a dramatic increase in numbers or severity over the past few days. The same trends are evident on the national level, and disease investigators are reverting to surveillance and control measures that are used during regular flu season.

“Here in the District, we received results back on five of our 13 outstanding specimens at the state Public Health Laboratory, and they were all negative for Swine Flu H1N1,” Grant said. “There are now eight specimens pending at the state lab. The District shipped out no new specimens for testing.”

As of Thursday at 4 p.m., Georgia continued to report four confirmed H1N1 cases, although the number of possible cases climbed to seven.

Grant praised the media, the Public Health community and its partners throughout the District for their response to the Swine Flu H1N1 outbreak.

“I do not believe this event has been overplayed by the media,” she said. “Remember, not only have two people died in this country, but many died and many more became ill in Mexico. Because the

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virus is new, we could not predict what it would do. As we gathered more information about it, we modified our response to reflect what we learned about the virus.

“It is important to keep in mind that regular seasonal influenza kills around 36,000 Americans and sends hundreds of thousands to the hospital each year,” Grant said. “Influenza poses a significant health concern.”

The H1N1 virus could mutate into a more virulent strain – or it could ramp up during the fall, she pointed out.

“So our response activities to this outbreak have been helpful,” Grant said. “We tested our preparedness procedures. We used Teletask, new communications technology, to help push information out to our partners, and we made greater use of our web site.”

She said Southwest Health District will seek feedback from county health departments, hospitals and other organizations on response activities.

“We want to hear from them what worked and what needs to be improved for next time,” she said. “And we want to thank our partners, the media and the communities of Southwest Georgia for their support during this outbreak. The response has been great.”

Information on H1N1 will continue to be available online at [www.southwestgeorgiapublichealth.org](http://www.southwestgeorgiapublichealth.org) and [www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/](http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/).

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