



## SOUTHWEST PUBLIC HEALTH DISTRICT

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July 30, 2009

**For Immediate Release**

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### **H1N1 confirmed in two Southwest Health District disease cluster investigations**

A pair of Influenza A outbreaks involving children in Southwest Health District have been confirmed as Pandemic H1N1 disease investigations, officials said today.

“We have received lab confirmation that one child associated with the Lee County cluster is infected with H1N1 and one child associated with the Dougherty County cluster is infected with H1N1,” said Southwest Health District Health Director Dr. Jacqueline Grant. “Twenty of 40 students enrolled in the Dougherty County summer program have experienced flu-like symptoms, and 12 out of 40 attendees who participated in the Lee County youth-oriented trip have fallen ill. All 32 patients with these similar symptoms are treated as H1N1 cases.”

Southwest Health District officials said Wednesday that Influenza A had been identified in both clusters. Pandemic H1N1 is a strain of Influenza A. Since around 99 percent of Influenza A cases in the United States being reported to the National Centers for Disease Control are H1N1, additional testing isn't required for others in the Lee or Dougherty clusters.

“We were expecting to hear that the clusters were Pandemic H1N1, and we expect to have more clusters occur when schools reopen,” Grant said. “This is a contagious, fast-spreading infection, and it has a high attack rate in children, teens and young adults. Parents, teachers and schools need to be vigilant.”

She stressed that if children become ill, they should not return to school until they have been free of symptoms for at least 24 hours after they are no longer using medication.

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

“Falling in line with the new policy, the District is now providing numbers of hospitalized H1N1 cases, rather than running case counts” Grant said.

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

Georgia has reported 44 hospitalizations involving confirmed cases of Pandemic H1N1 and one fatality. In Southwest Health District, six hospitalizations have been reported, but of that number, only two patients with confirmed cases of H1N1 are currently in the hospital, she said. Thomas, Dougherty, Lee, Decatur, Mitchell and Colquitt counties have residents with confirmed cases of H1N1 in Southwest Health District as of today. Other specimens are awaiting laboratory confirmation.

“Most people with Pandemic H1N1 get well in less than a week without needing hospitalization,” she said. “But in high-risk groups – women who are pregnant and people with underlying medical conditions or chronic disease – H1N1 can be a severe disease that can lead to hospitalization and even death.”

On Wednesday, Southwest Health District partially reactivated its Pandemic H1N1 Emergency Operations Center and stepped up surveillance and education efforts in the region.

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, Grant said.

“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,” she said.

“For now we are going with the same recommendation for Pandemic H1N1 that we make for seasonal flu – unless so many people are sick that the program can’t operate, there’s no need to cancel the program or class,” 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.

Vaccine for the pandemic virus is unlikely to be ready until mid-October. However, seasonal flu vaccine is expected to begin arriving as soon as late August or early September, and Grant urged residents to start getting seasonal vaccinations as soon as they can.

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.

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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](http://www.southwestgeorgiapublichealth.org) and [www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/](http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/).

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