



SOUTHWEST PUBLIC HEALTH DISTRICT

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Public Health provides Dougherty County flu update and homecare and prevention tips

The influenza-like illnesses affecting students and staff in Southwest Georgia schools are being treated as a pandemic H1N1 flu clusters, even though not all of those who are sick have received positive test results for the infection, Southwest Health District Health Director Dr. Jacqueline Grant says.

“Public Health has been working closely with school systems, many of which are reporting incidents of flu-like illness,” Dr. Grant said. “Pandemic H1N1 is in our District, so we are not surprised to see clusters popping up as schools reopen for the fall.”

Once clusters – groups in which everyone has similar symptoms – are identified, disease investigators need only one positive diagnosis and do not test everyone who has symptoms, she said.

“Positive confirmation that one of the sick people in a group has H1N1 allows us, from an epidemiological standpoint, to treat everyone in the group with similar symptoms as H1N1 cases,” she said. “By treatment, we mean that they are handled (for instance, placed in isolation until the parent arrives to pick them up, etc.) as if they had H1N1.”

Not all persons with flu-like illnesses need medical treatment. The majority of pandemic H1N1 flu cases are mild to moderate, with most patients recovering at home as they would with regular seasonal flu, said Dougherty County Health Department Director Cheryl Henley.

“Pandemic H1N1 flu is more contagious than regular seasonal flu, and it has a high attack rate in children and teens. The symptoms are fever, cough or sore throat, headache and fatigue. Many patients, especially young ones, are also experiencing nausea and vomiting,” Henley said. “We are telling students and staff at schools who come down with flu symptoms to go to a room separate from others until they can go home.”

They should also wear surgical masks if possible so that droplets from coughs and sneezes carrying the virus won’t infect others, she said. People taking care of someone with flu-like illness should also wear protective gear.

“It is extremely important to stay home if you are sick until 24 hours after your fever is gone without using fever-reducing medicine,” Henley said.

Further, people at high risk for flu complications who are in close contact with someone with flu-like symptoms – or if they become ill with symptoms of flu – should speak to their healthcare provider as soon as possible, she said.

“Early treatment with antiviral medicine is very important for people at high risk because it may prevent complications,” said Grant. “People at high risk include those who are pregnant, have asthma or

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

diabetes, have immune systems that don't work well or have chronic illnesses like kidney disease, heart disease or cancer.”

Because H1N1 flu is known to be circulating in Southwest Georgia, more people are expected to fall ill, especially now that schools are back in session, she said. “At this point, whether you are tested and actually diagnosed with H1N1 flu is less important than what you do if you become sick. Rapid flu tests are not 100 percent accurate for diagnosis of H1N1.”

Grant offered the following recommendations for homecare for people with flu symptoms:

- Check with their healthcare provider about special care they may need if they have an underlying health condition.
- Make sure patients get lots of rest.
- Patients should drink plenty of clear fluids so they won't get dehydrated.
- Patients should wear a mask if possible so they won't pass flu germs to the rest of the household.
- Do not give aspirin to children with the flu. Use a fever-reducer without it, such as Tylenol®.
- If symptoms include difficulty breathing, vomiting and the inability to hold down liquids, or if flu-like symptoms get better then return with higher fever and worse cough, emergency medical treatment is needed right away.

“In addition, people can help keep the flu from spreading by washing their hands often with soap and water, using alcohol-based hand sanitizer, covering coughs and sneezes and avoiding touching your eyes, mouth and nose,” Grant said.

Finally, Grant praised Dougherty County's schools for their response. “The schools have responded appropriately,” she said. “They have an excellent working relationship with local and district public health.”

For more information about Pandemic H1N1, contact the Dougherty County Health Department or go on-line to www.southwestgeorgiapublichealth.org.

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