

H1N1 reported in county

Written by Chris Lee

H1N1 virus has been detected in Phillips County according to hospital officials and members of the Northeast Colorado Health Department (NCHD). As of last week there had been no hospitalized cases in Phillips County.

With flu season just around the corner, people are urged to receive the seasonal vaccine and the H1N1 vaccine once available, according to Tammy Hort, NCHD communicable disease coordinator.

Being proactive and staying home if symptoms are present is what people should do to help prevent the spreading of the virus.

Melissa Memorial Hospital (MMH) recently put together a flu committee and held a meeting with Deanna Herbert, NCHD public information officer and Hort. Administrator John Ayoub said the hospital wants to be proactive as they head into flu season so the committee held a meeting with Hort and Herbert.

Herbert said some of the guidelines have changed throughout the federal and state levels with regard to vaccine and testing. Their job is to educate the area hospitals.

Hort stressed the big thing to remember is to stay home and keep kids home from school if there are any symptoms present. If someone is concerned, call your physician, she said. Taking good healthy measures is important as well. Washing hands, covering coughs and keeping hydrated are all good ways to help stay healthy.

The priority groups for the H1N1 vaccine have changed because the amount of vaccine will be in shorter supply than initially thought. Pregnant women are one of the first priority groups along with people who live with or care for children younger than 6 months of age, health care and emergency medical services personnel with direct patient contact, children 6 months through 4 years of age and children age 5-18 who have chronic medical conditions.

As vaccine supplies increase, the target groups listed above will increase with all people from 6 months through 24 years of age and persons aged 25-64 who have health conditions associated with higher risk of medical complications from influenza being added.

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Hort said not everyone who has the symptoms will be tested or treated because not everyone needs it. People who have a history of diabetes or other high risk types of chronic illnesses and see symptoms of the flu are urged to call their physician immediately.

Hort said the H1N1 virus spreads more easily and more quickly than the seasonal flu. She also said it is estimated roughly 5-20 percent of the population will catch the seasonal flu and upwards of 30-50 percent will acquire the H1N1 flu. It could impact a wide variety of businesses with multiple people becoming sick. "The illness is mild but the potential for it to cause some disruption we're not used to seeing is increased," she added.

MMH Director of Nursing Claudia Powell said employers should visit with employees about their sick leave policy.

Ayoub said the hospital has changed its policies a little and is asking people to look at visitation at the hospital a little more carefully. They have placed masks and hand sanitizer around the hospital including the exits to help reduce the spreading of germs.

When should someone seek help if symptoms are present? Powell said in children the warning signs are fast breathing or trouble breathing, bluish or gray skin color, not drinking enough fluids, severe or persistent vomiting, not waking up or not interacting, being so irritable that the child does not want to be held or flu-like symptoms that improve but then return with fever and worse cough.

In adults, the warning signs are difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen, sudden dizziness, confusion, severe or persistent vomiting and flu-like symptoms that improve but then return with fever and worse cough.

Hort said the only reportable influenza cases are those that are hospitalized. Tests on an outpatient basis are not reported to public health.

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Herbert said they are tracking hospitalized cases on the NCHD website. As of last week there had been no hospitalized cases of H1N1 in Phillips County. Powell said there have been confirmed cases in Holyoke but not hospitalized.

For more information on influenza visit www.nchd.org.