

Influenza a concern for back-to-school

Written by Chris Lee

With kids back in school the risk for spreading germs is again a concern.

With this year's outbreak of the H1N1 flu, health agencies urge parents and their children to use caution heading back to school.

Even though the closest confirmed case of H1N1 was in Ft. Morgan, it is still a threat. Keeping healthy and smart is a good idea for all.

"This is not a cause for panic," John Ayoub, Melissa Memorial Hospital (MMH) Administrator said.

There are about 36,000 people each year that die because of the average seasonal flu. So far with H1N1 there have been less than 1,000 people die as a result, Ayoub said.

Pat Notter, RN at MMH, said a vaccination for H1N1 is in the works but not finalized. Once the vaccination becomes available to MMH they will begin administering it to the public. The vaccine comes through the State Health Dept.

According to Notter and Claudia Powell, director of nursing, the target groups for the H1N1 vaccine are younger youth, pregnant women, children 6 months to 4 years of age, school children and health care providers.

"They aren't recommending the vaccine for everyone," Notter said.

Anyone is encouraged to receive the usual flu vaccine when it is available. Notter said the hospital will hold two regular clinics as they have done in the past. She also said the flu vaccine should be available early October.

Ayoub, Notter and Powell said eating right, drinking fluids, washing hands and staying home when flu symptoms are visible will greatly curb the spread of the flu.

Influenza a concern for back-to-school

Written by Chris Lee

Staying home 24 hours after the symptoms of the flu have subsided is recommended. Ayoub said the 24 hours begin after a fever is gone, not when medicines are taken.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) along with the Colorado Dept. of Health offer tips to help child-care professionals, teachers, parents and students understand ways to help slow the spread of the seasonal and H1N1 influenza this year.

—avoid close contact with people who are sick. When someone is sick, keep distance from others to protect them from getting sick too.

—stay home from work, school and errands when sick. It will help prevent others from catching the illness.

—cover mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Throw the tissue in the trash after use. Do not cough or sneeze into hands as it can spread germs.

—washing hands and the hands of children often will help protect from germs. If soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers.

—germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his/her eyes, nose or mouth.

—get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage stress, drink plenty of fluids and eat nutritious foods.

With school back in session around the United States, the CDC has also provided information for K-12 schools and institutions of higher education, businesses, mass gatherings and other community settings.

Influenza a concern for back-to-school

Written by Chris Lee

—decisions about school closures should be at the discretion of local authorities based on local considerations, including public concern and the impact of school absenteeism and staffing shortages.

—school dismissal is not advised unless there is a magnitude of faculty or student absenteeism that interferes with the school's ability to function.

—schools should focus on early identification of students and staff who are ill, staying home when ill and good cough and hand hygiene etiquette.

—those with flu-like illness should stay home and not attend school or go into the community except to seek medical care for at least 24 hours after their fever is gone.

—students, faculty and staff who appear to have a flu-like illness at arrival or become ill during the day should be isolated promptly in a room separate from other students until they can be sent home.

—school staff should routinely clean areas students and staff often touch with the cleaners they typically use.

—people at high risk for influenza complications who become ill with influenza-like illness should speak with their health care provider as soon as possible.

—roommates or those caring for someone with flu-like illness, should view "Taking care of a sick person in your home" at <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidance>.

Influenza a concern for back-to-school

Written by Chris Lee
