New Flu A H1N1 (Previously called Swine Flu) Update
Noon, Monday, May 11, 2009

CURRENT STATUS

There are 23 confirmed cases of new flu A H1N1 in the Los Angeles County; 31 probable cases are pending confirmation (case counts exclude Long Beach and Pasadena). Public Health continues to investigate possible cases, illness clusters, and monitor for severe cases by tracking patient visits and hospitalizations. To date in the U.S., illness from this new flu has been mostly mild to moderate—similar to seasonal flu. Most new flu illnesses have resolved without complications and without the need to see a doctor or receive treatment.

KEY PREVENTION TIPS

- Stay home if you are sick
- Wash your hands often
- Cover your cough
- Avoid touching your face (eyes, nose and mouth)

DON'T PRESCRIBE OR REQUEST TAMIFLU FOR ROUTINE ILLNESSES

Incorrect and overuse of antivirals is dangerous and can lead to antiviral resistance. Remember:

- Nearly all cases of new flu in the U.S. have resolved without complications and without the need to take tamiflu® (oseltamivir).
- Many other illnesses have similar symptoms as flu (fever, cough, fatigue), but are **not** flu, and are not effectively treated with antivirals.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Certain people should take extra precaution against colds and flu.
Some people can become seriously ill if they get the flu, this includes: pregnant women, infants, the elderly, people with HIV or cancer who may have weakened immune systems, and those with heart or lung disease. It is very important that these people take extra care to avoid close contact with other people who are sick, and contact their healthcare provider immediately if the do become sick.

The pandemic phase level was raised to 5. What does that mean, should I be concerned?
Phase 5 describes how clusters of cases have been found in several countries around the world and that the illness is likely to spread. This description does not reflect the current situation in LA County and does not describe the ***severity*** of illness. However, this change in phase level does stress the importance of doing your best to reduce the spread of illness in our communities: stay home if you are sick, wash your hands often, cover your coughs, and avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.

How do I know if I have new flu A H1N1 (previously called swine flu)?
The symptoms of this flu are the same as those for regular flu: fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, chills, headache, and fatigue. Some cases also have had vomiting and diarrhea.

How do I keep from getting this new flu?
Prevention recommendations are the same as seasonal flu: wash your hands often, avoid close contact with people who are sick, avoid touching your face (eyes, nose, and mouth).

Should I avoid going out and going to events?
No. There is no reason to avoid public gatherings or events. But as always, stay home if you are sick; and practice healthy habits like washing your hands.

Should I keep my child out of school?
No. But children that are sick should stay at home until better—not just now, but always.

What should I do if I have flu-like symptoms?
Anyone that is sick (fever, cough sore throat) should stay home—not just now, but always! If you become sick, go home as soon as possible and stay home until 24 hours after your fever ends. A mild cough may continue after many illnesses have stopped and should not be the only reason for sending a person home or refusing readmission.

How do I care for someone with flu-like illness?
The same as always: provide water or other fluids, and watch to see if symptoms get worse or do not resolve. Many basic over-the-counter medications can reduce fever and make people feel better. Precautions to limit the spread of flu-like illness when caring for someone are the same as what you should do for regular colds and flu:

- Limit contact with the sick person and avoid close contact (kissing, hugging)
- Do not share personal hygiene items (toothbrushes, towels)
- Wash your hands often

KEEP EMERGENCY ROOMS AND HOSPITALS FREE TO TREAT SERIOUS ILLNESSES!

- People with mild illnesses should not go to ERs or hospitals for treatment.
- Most people with flu-like illness will get better without the need to see a doctor or take special medicines.

Should I buy medicines to treat flu?
Antiviral medications should be taken only under the guidance of a medical doctor since medicines can have side effects, especially if they are not taken correctly. It is important to remember that most flu-like illness resolves without the need to see a doctor or to take medication (besides basic over-the-counter medicines to reduce fever and make you feel better). It is also important to remember that many other illnesses cause flu-like symptoms—and if your illness is not caused by the flu, flu antivirals will not make you better. Incorrect and overuse of antivirals is not only dangerous, but can also lead to further viral resistance.

Should I wash surfaces to avoid getting sick with flu?
Germs can spread when a person touches something that's contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth. Cleaning common surfaces can help kill germs and reduce infections, but it's not practical or possible to clean surfaces continuously—it is impossible to clean everything as well as have it stay clean all the time. The best way to avoid getting the flu does not include special cleaning procedures beyond normal. But it is especially important to wash your hands and avoid touching your face (eyes, nose, and mouth).

What are more serious signs of flu illness?
While to date most new flu cases in the U.S. have been mild to moderate, and in general people with flu-like illness will get better without complications, seek medical care if you experience any of these more severe symptoms:

For children, watch for:
- If flu-like symptoms do not get better after a few days or become worse
- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Dehydration; unable to drink enough fluids
- Not waking up, not interacting; Confusion, being disoriented
- Fever with a rash

For adults:
- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting

DON'T GIVE ASPIRIN TO CHILDREN FOR FLU SYMPTOMS

- Over-the-counter cold and flu medications used according to package instructions may help lessen symptoms but will not lessen how infectious a person is. These medicines might make feel better, but you can still spread germs.
- Don't use medication that contains aspirin (acetylsalicylic acid) because it can cause a rare but serious illness called Reye's syndrome.
- Take medicines ***without*** aspirin, such as:
  - Acetaminophen (Tylenol®)
  - Ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®, Nuprin®)
  - Naproxen (Aleve®)
- Don't give children younger than age 2 any over-the-counter cold medications without first speaking with a doctor. Safest care includes using a cool-mist humidifier and a suction bulb to help clear away mucus.

Can people who have just come from Mexico be allowed to return to school or work?
LACDPH does not recommend restricting people from any public events or interaction simply due to recent travel to affected areas, even Mexico. Thousands of people travel to and from Mexico daily, and quarantine recommendations for these people have not been enacted by local, state or federal agencies. As mentioned during our press conference (it's on YouTube), we are beyond containment and now focusing on limiting the number of cases. Instead, ALL people should monitor their health. Everyone should avoid all public activities if they are sick; and not just now, but always.

Instead of singling out people who have traveled to Mexico, focus should be on identifying those with flu-like symptoms (fever, cough, fatigue, etc.). This is a great opportunity for schools and businesses to stress the importance of staying home when sick, and basic respiratory hygiene practices (wash your hands, cover your cough, etc.).

Where can I get more information?
For more information about this illness call: California Department of Public Health hotline: 888-865-0564

911 is not for health information!
Keep emergency lines open.

Or visit these websites:
- Los Angeles County Department of Public Health: http://publichealth.lacounty.gov
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/general_info.htm

If you need help finding medical care, please call the Los Angeles County Infoline: 2-1-1.