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AMMC OFFERS TIPS FOR FIGHTING FLU

Seasonal Flu Vaccine Now Available, Special Focus on H1N1 “Swine” Flu Virus

PARAGOULD, AR -- In addition to the common flu season that begins in the fall, this year, added attention is being paid to the spread of the H1N1 or “swine flu” virus. AMMC Family Practice Physician and Greene County Health Officer Dr. Dwight Williams notes, “Everyone should get a seasonal flu shot. The H1N1 virus has been a novel problem thus far. The good news is that a specialized vaccine just for H1N1 should be available soon.”

AMMC President and CEO Ron Rooney says, “Knowing that members of the community are concerned, AMMC is committed to informing patients and the public as to how best protect themselves from the seasonal flu and the H1N1 virus. As a medical center, we will continue to provide additional information on the availability of the H1N1 vaccine as soon as it becomes available.” AMMC will also continue to work in partnership with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Arkansas Department of Health (ADH), by spreading the word about how to protect yourself from the flu this season.

With the seasonal flu, on average, more than 200,000 people in the U.S. are hospitalized and some 36,000 die due to seasonal flu-related complications. Symptoms of the flu may include: fever, (usually high); headache; extreme tiredness; dry cough; runny or stuffy nose; muscle aches; chills, sore throat; and sometimes diarrhea and vomiting. *Symptoms for the H1N1 virus may be similar or more severe in nature.*

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The CDC recommends three critical action steps to protect against the flu.

Get Vaccinated. A yearly seasonal flu vaccination is the first and most important step in protecting against the flu. The vaccine is especially important for people at high risk of serious flu complications including: young children; pregnant women; people with chronic health conditions like asthma, diabetes or heart and lung disease; and people 65 years of age and older, as well as healthcare providers and caretakers for these high risk groups. AMMC is currently offering the seasonal flu vaccine to staff members and it is available to patients upon physician approval. As recommended by the CDC, most physician offices will be offering the vaccine early this year. Medicare covers the cost of the seasonal flu vaccination for the elderly. The Mission Outreach Charitable Clinic will be offering flu vaccinations to qualifying patients. *The seasonal flu vaccine does not protect against the H1N1 virus. Details on administration of the H1N1 are not complete at this time, but an ample supply is expected to be available to the public sometime in mid-October. According to the ADH, in addition to the above mentioned groups the following are at added risk for the H1N1 virus: All people from 6 months to 24 years of age; children from 6 months to 18 years of age because the state has seen many cases of the virus, due to close contact in daycare and school settings; young adults 19-24 years of age because the state has seen many cases of the virus, because they often live, work and play in close proximity and are mobile; persons aged 25-64 who have health conditions associated with higher risk of medical complications from the flu.*

Take Everyday Preventive Steps. Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue, a sleeve or your elbow, when you cough or sneeze. Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze; alcohol-based hand sanitizers are also effective. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth because germs are spread this way. Avoid contact with sick people. If you have the flu, the CDC recommends that you stay home until at least 24 hours after your fever is gone, except to seek medical care.

Take flu-antiviral drugs, if recommended. If you get the seasonal or H1N1 flu, antiviral drugs can treat both. Antiviral drugs are prescription medications (pills, liquid or an inhaled powder) that fight against the flu and work best if given within the first two days of symptoms. Antiviral drugs can make your virus milder, make you feel better and help prevent serious

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complications. Antiviral drugs are not sold over-the-counter and are different from antibiotics. Antiviral drugs may be especially important for people who are hospitalized, or are at increased risk for serious complications such as: pregnant women, young children, those with chronic health conditions and the elderly.

A recognized leader, Arkansas Methodist Medical Center in Paragould provides progressive, compassionate healthcare to residents throughout Northeast Arkansas and Southeast Missouri. Additional information about AMMC is available at: www.arkansasmethodist.org.