



**Arkansas Methodist
Medical Center**

It's all about you.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, September 15, 2009

FLU SEASON ARRIVING EARLY THIS YEAR:

What to Do if You Suspect You Have the Flu

PARAGOULD, AR – Arkansas Methodist Medical Center wants to remind citizens that this year's flu season is arriving early, with both seasonal and H1N1 flu already on the rise across the nation. Localized areas of flu have been reported in Arkansas.

Your flu defenses, flu's signs and symptoms, best actions to take and warning signals are similar for both seasonal and the new, novel H1N1 (Swine) flu.

We want you to know how to protect yourself from getting the flu, what this year's signs and symptoms are, what to do if you get the flu, and when it is proper to seek emergency care.

DEFENSES: WASH YOUR HANDS AND COVER THOSE COUGHS/SNEEZES

Proper hand washing is your best defense against any type of flu. Wash your hands often – getting the soapsuds on the fronts and backs of hands and fingers (washing around and underneath rings or other jewelry) for at least 20 seconds before rinsing. Especially wash if you have had contact with someone who is sick, or if you have coughed or sneezed into your hands.

Use of alcohol-based hand cleaners is also effective. It must be rubbed on the hands and allowed to dry on its own (don't "dry" your hands on your clothing; this negates the cleaner's effectiveness).

Covering your coughs and sneezes is also important. Your best action is to cough or sneeze into a tissue, then throw the tissue away and wash your hands. If no tissue is available, cough or sneeze into your sleeve or your elbow.

Keep your hands (and therefore, germs) away from your eyes, nose, mouth, and face.

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FLU SEASON ARRIVING EARLY THIS YEAR/Page 2

Whenever possible, stay away from those who are sick, and if you do get the flu, stay home in order to heal and to avoid exposing others and spreading the virus. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Arkansas Department of Health (ADH), you should not return to work or school until you have been free of fever for 24 hours *without* the use of a fever-controlling medication (like acetaminophen or ibuprofen).

ACTIONS: KNOW THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF FLU – AND WHAT YOU SHOULD DO IF YOU’RE GETTING SICK

The CDC indicates that symptoms of novel H1N1 flu virus are similar to the symptoms of seasonal flu and include sudden onset of fever of more than 100 degrees, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and extreme fatigue.

A significant number of people who have been infected with novel H1N1 flu virus, particularly children, also have reported diarrhea and vomiting. As with any flu virus, this year’s strains may cause an individual’s pre-existing chronic conditions to worsen.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU THINK YOU (OR YOUR CHILD) ARE GETTING THE FLU:

1) Your primary care physician or pediatrician is your first line of medical defense when dealing with the flu. To seek medical advice, patients are encouraged to first call their primary care physicians or pediatricians to explain their symptoms. The healthcare provider will determine whether or not the patient needs to be seen.

2) Your healthcare provider will also determine whether flu testing or treatment is needed. The CDC wants citizens to be aware that if the flu becomes widespread, less testing will be needed, so your healthcare provider may decide not to test for the flu virus.

Antiviral drugs can be given to treat those who become severely ill with influenza. These antiviral drugs are prescription medicines (pills, liquid or an inhaler) with activity against influenza viruses, including novel H1N1 flu virus. These medications must be prescribed by a healthcare professional.

3) When treating yourself or your child at home with over-the-counter medications for fever and/or flu symptoms, the CDC reminds us that children under 19 years of age should not be treated with aspirin (or products containing aspirin, such as Pepto Bismol) because of the risk of Reye’s syndrome. Instead, for children ages 5-18, the use of acetaminophen or ibuprofen is recommended. Children under the age of 5 should not be given these over-the-counter medications unless advised by a physician.

4) The CDC projects that many people will recover from this year’s flu viruses without requiring medical care. Staying home, keeping comfortable with the use of over-the-counter medications and not returning to work or school until the person has been fever-free without use of fever-

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FLU SEASON ARRIVING EARLY THIS YEAR/Page 3

reducing medications for 24 hours will suffice for many. However, there are warning signs that indicate emergency medical care is needed.

THE CDC'S FLU WARNING SIGNS - WHEN TO SEEK EMERGENCY MEDICAL CARE:

In children, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- fast breathing or marked trouble breathing,
- bluish skin color (especially around the lips),
- becoming dehydrated (not drinking enough fluids and not urinating, or in infants, not producing tears when they cry),
- not waking up or not interacting,
- being so irritable that the child does not want to be held,
- fever with a rash,
- flu-like symptoms that improve but then return with fever or worse cough.

In adults, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- difficulty breathing or shortness of breath,
- pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen,
- sudden dizziness or confusion,
- severe or persistent vomiting.

As in children, adults should seek medical care if flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever or worse cough.

THINGS TO REMEMBER:

- The CDC reminds us that bacterial infections may sometimes occur either at the same time as or after infection with influenza viruses and lead to pneumonias, ear infections, or sinus infections. It is important to monitor how you (or your child) feel for several days after the flu has cleared, to make certain secondary infections are not occurring. Contact your physician or pediatrician if you suspect a secondary infection.

Certain groups might be more likely to develop a severe illness from novel H1N1 flu infection, such as pregnant women and persons with chronic medical conditions.

- It is recommended that people seek and receive *both* the seasonal flu vaccine and the specialized H1N1 flu vaccine when they become available. The seasonal flu vaccine should be available shortly, and will be available from physicians, pharmacies, and through seasonal mass flu vaccination clinics throughout the state of Arkansas (go to

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FLU SEASON ARRIVING EARLY THIS YEAR/Page 4

www.healthyarkansas.com and view “Seasonal Mass Flu Clinic Sites.”

- The vaccine for H1N1 flu is expected to be available in October or as soon as proper testing has been completed.
- CDC’s Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) has recommended that certain groups of the population receive the 2009 H1N1 vaccine when it first becomes available. These target groups include pregnant women, people who live with or care for children younger than 6 months of age, healthcare and emergency medical services personnel, persons between the ages of 6 months and 24 years old, and people ages 25 through 64 years of age who are at higher risk for 2009 H1N1 because of chronic health disorders or compromised immune systems.

CDC CHECKLIST FOR PEOPLE WITH NOVEL H1N1 FLU BEING CARED FOR AT HOME:

- Check with your healthcare provider about any special care you might need if you are pregnant or have a health condition such as diabetes, heart disease, asthma, or emphysema
- Check with your healthcare provider about whether you should take antiviral medications
- Keep away from others as much as possible. This is to keep from making others sick. Do not go to work or school while ill
- Stay home for at least 24 hours after fever is gone, except to seek medical care or for other necessities. (Fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.)
- Get plenty of rest
- Drink clear fluids (such as water, broth, sports drinks, electrolyte beverages for infants) to keep from being dehydrated
- Cover coughs and sneezes. Clean hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub often and especially after using tissues and after coughing or sneezing into hands
- Be watchful for emergency warning signs (see above) that might indicate you need to seek immediate medical attention.

Arkansas Methodist Medical Center wants to help keep you safe and well during this flu season. For additional information and updates on both seasonal and H1N1 flu viruses, you may visit the CDC’s special flu Web site (www.flu.gov), or the Web site of the Arkansas Department of Health (www.healthyarkansas.com).

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.