



Sept. 3, 2009

Department of Public Health

For Immediate Release

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Update: Pandemic influenza H1N1 (2009) virus in El Paso

El Paso, Texas – Health officials are encouraging all El Pasoans to prepare for the Pandemic Influenza H1N1 (2009) virus. The fall and winter months typically are the most active for influenza and city-wide preparations are underway for what is expected to be a very active season.

“The Department of Public Health is committed to keeping the community continually informed on the situation with H1N1 Influenza,” said Michael Hill, Health Director of the City of El Paso Department of Public Health. “We are making plans with all our local partners, including schools, hospitals, government agencies, emergency management, law enforcement, and businesses as well as with our partners in New Mexico and Mexico.”

People at high risk for complications from influenza include; pregnant women, children under 5 years of age, adults and children with chronic lung disease, heart disease, diabetes, or other medical conditions that weaken one’s immune system. The symptoms of H1N1 Influenza are very similar to the seasonal flu.

“Fever greater than 100 degrees, body aches, coughing, sore throat, respiratory congestion, and in some cases diarrhea or vomiting are all symptoms of the flu,” Hill said.

The Department of Public Health recommends that individuals call a health care provider if they are experiencing any of these symptoms. Early treatment with antiviral medications is very important for people at high risk to help prevent hospitalizations or deaths.

An H1N1 vaccine is being produced and El Paso has plans to receive and distribute the vaccine once it’s available. The U.S. is expected to distribute 45 million doses in the first shipment due in mid-October.

In El Paso, medical providers have until September 11, 2009 to sign up to receive the vaccine for their patients. Health official say it’s important for individuals in our community to receive both the seasonal flu and the H1N1 flu.

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To decrease the spread of H1N1 flu and the seasonal flu in our community, the Department of Public Health is asking El Pasoans to follow these simple guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

Individuals:

Remember the 4 C's:

- Clean – wash your hands often. Scrub your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand cleaner.
- Cover – cover your cough. Use a tissue to cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze. Don't have a tissue? The crook of your elbow will do.
- Contain – contain germs by steering clear of others who are sick. If you do not get sick, stay at home until you're well again, so you don't spread more germs.
- Call – call or see your doctor if you or your child has a fever of greater than 100 degrees.
- Individuals should also
 - Stay healthy by eating a balanced diet, drinking plenty of water and getting adequate rest and exercise.
 - Clean surfaces and items that are more likely to have frequent hand contact.

Businesses, schools and daycares:

- Keep sick individuals home.
- People who have flu-like symptoms should remain at home and isolated away from others until at least 24 hours after they are free of fever or signs of a fever, without the use of fever-reducing medications. A fever is defined as 100° F (37.8 C) or higher.
- In the workplace human resources and management should review policies to ensure they are consistent with public health recommendations and state and federal workplace laws. Leave policies should be flexible and non-punitive. Develop or review flexible leave policies to allow workers to stay home to care for sick family members or to watch their children if schools or childcare facilities close.
- Do not require a doctor's note for workers/students who are ill with influenza-like illness to validate their illness or return to work/school, as doctor's offices and medical facilities maybe extremely busy and may not be able to provide such documentation in a timely manner.
- Establish a flexible influenza pandemic plan and involve your staff in developing and reviewing your plan. Share your plan with your staff and include the following:
 - Cross-train employees to cover essential functions in case of high absenteeism.
 - Explore whether you can establish policies and practices, such as flexible worksites (e.g., telecommuting) and flexible work hours (e.g. staggered shifts) to increase the physical distance among employees and between employees and customers.

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- Encourage employees to get vaccinated for both the seasonal influenza and the H1N1 flu when the vaccines become available.

For more information call 2-1-1 or visit: www.elpasotexas.gov/health;
<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidance>; or www.flu.gov.

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