

State of Montana

DPHHS HAN ADVISORY

Thursday, August 6, 2009

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DPHHS Information / Recommendations:

Montana Reports First H1N1 Influenza Death

A Roosevelt County adult has died from complications related to novel H1N1 influenza, the Montana Department of Health and Human Services (DPHHS), Roosevelt County Health Department and Fort Peck Tribal Health announced today.

This is the state's first reported death linked to H1N1 influenza.

In addition to having H1N1 influenza, the individual who died had other underlying medical conditions. To protect the family's privacy, the Department will not release other information about the case.

"Our heart goes out to the family," DPHHS Director Anna Whiting Sorrell said.

For most people, H1N1 influenza is causing mild illness; however, it can be very serious for people with preexisting or underlying medical conditions, said state medical officer Dr. Steven Helgerson.

"Nothing we have seen so far in the United States suggests that the H1N1 influenza virus is more dangerous than influenza viruses that circulate every year," Dr. Helgerson said. "Tragically, influenza causes about 36,000 deaths each year in the United States and about 100 in Montana."

Since May, DPHHS officials have confirmed 133 cases of influenza caused by the H1N1 virus in Montana. However, that number represents a fraction of the actual number of cases since most people do not seek medical treatment or get the laboratory tests necessary to confirm influenza caused by the H1N1 virus.

As of July 30, 2009, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has confirmed 353 deaths from the virus across the country, most of which occurred in persons with preexisting medical conditions.

Influenza virus is spread through the coughing and sneezing of an infected person, or by touching things that have the virus on them, then touching your nose or mouth. "I can't emphasize enough the importance of hand washing and staying home when you're sick," Dr. Helgerson said.

A person with influenza can spread the virus for a day or two before symptoms appear until 7 days after the first symptoms or until the symptoms go away, whichever is longer. The symptoms of H1N1 influenza are the same as seasonal influenza.

These symptoms are:

- Fever higher than 100 degrees
- Body aches
- Coughing
- Sore throat
- Respiratory congestion
- Possible vomiting and diarrhea (in addition to respiratory symptoms)

Influenza cases are occurring throughout the state, and it is possible that other deaths will occur. It is especially important for persons with chronic medical conditions, pregnant women and persons caring for young children to take steps to keep from getting influenza.

The prevention tips below will help Montanans protect themselves and others from infection by influenza viruses:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread that way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people. Influenza is thought to spread mainly person-to-person through coughing or sneezing of infected people.
- If you get sick, stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

Vaccine for novel H1N1 influenza is being developed and may be available at some point this fall. Vaccine for the seasonal influenza virus has been produced and it is expected to be available as early as September.

For more information about the novel H1N1 strain of influenza, please visit the DPHHS website at www.dphhs.mt.gov or contact your health care provider.

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Health Alert Network (HAN) System

DPHHS Health Alert Hotline: 1-800-701-5769

DPHHS HAN Website: www.han.mt.gov

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The goal of Montana's Health Alert Network is to transmit information to local public health authorities as quickly as possible, and assign a suitable priority to the message. For questions or comments about to Montana's HAN system you may contact the DPHHS HAN Coordinator, Gerry Wheat at gwheat@mt.gov.

Categories of Health Alert messages:

Health Alert: conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

Health Advisory: provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

Health Update: provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.