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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 27, 2009

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THE FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH IS READY TO RESPOND TO SWINE FLU

TALLAHASSEE--While no cases have been identified in Florida at this time, cases of swine flu have been confirmed in the U.S., according to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. There are an undetermined number of cases in Mexico reaching into the hundreds.

"This is a situation where we must all be on the alert," said Dr. Ana Viamonte Ros, Florida's State Surgeon General. "We have increased our surveillance and we're telling doctors that since the flu season is waning, if they see patients with sudden onset high fever and a cough or sore throat, they should collect a specimen for testing."

Dr. Viamonte Ros said the Florida Department of Health has a response plan and has put it into play. "Our state laboratories have the equipment necessary and our personnel are trained in identifying influenza samples. We have increased surveillance, alerted doctors and are working with our local health departments," she said.

Florida has prepared for influenza events:

- All state laboratories have the facilities to safely identify influenza samples.
- The state has almost 100 sentinel physicians who report any unusual influenza like activity to DOH and the CDC.
- We have the ability to monitor the sale of over the counter drugs, as an early warning sign for increased influenza activity.

The State Surgeon General provided these recommendations:



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- As always, people with respiratory illness should stay home from work or school to avoid spreading infections, including influenza, to others in the community.
- Avoid close contact with people who are coughing or otherwise appear ill.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Wash hands frequently to lessen the spread of respiratory illness.
- People experiencing cough, fever and fatigue, possibly along with diarrhea and vomiting, should contact their physician.
- If you think you have influenza, please call your health care provider and discuss whether you need to be seen in their office or emergency department or stay home.

Swine influenza viruses are not transmitted by food and a person cannot get swine influenza from eating pork products. The infections appear to spread from person to person. Drugs called antivirals can reduce the consequences of contracting the flu, if taken early.

Dr. Viamonte Ros said Florida is receiving frequent updates from the CDC, and is working with local health departments to monitor the situation and immediately follow up on any suspected cases. The CDC has created a Webpage with information at www.cdc.gov/swineflu.

The Florida Department of Health is ready to respond to this emerging event," Dr. Viamonte Ros said. "We have plans in place for this kind of emergency."

"We are in contact with our community partners and we are ready to respond on a local level as well," added DeSoto County Health Department Administrator Mary Kay Burns. "Doing simple things such as practicing thorough hand washing and sneezing and coughing into your sleeve can do a lot to reduce your risk of infection."

DeSoto Memorial Hospital asks that anyone seeking treatment at the hospital with symptoms as described by the health department ask for and wear a mask. Every entry station into the hospital has masks and hand sanitizer available. Front desk personnel at the Hospital and Center for Family Health have been instructed to give persons with respiratory symptoms a mask and ask them to clean their hands with hand sanitizer. First and foremost is the protection of our patients and staff. To that end, we ask that persons who are experiencing even mild respiratory symptoms refrain from visiting hospitalized patients.

The DeSoto County Health Department also requests that patients suspecting that they may have influenza like symptoms call ahead and speak to a nurse to determine appropriate treatment. Those coming to the Health Department or the Center for Health and Disease Management with influenza like symptoms should follow the hospital protocols as described above.

DeSoto County residents experiencing any of the symptoms should contact their health care provider or the DeSoto County Health Department's Center for Health and Disease Management at (863) 993-4601 x250. Follow swine flu updates at www.desotocountyhealth.com or on Twitter at DeSotoCoHealth.

For more information, please contact Melissa Sanders at 863-558-0542 or Melissa_sanders@doh.state.fl.us.
