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Dept. of Health Provides Recommendations for People Sick with Flu Symptoms

(Las Cruces) – The New Mexico Department of Health is advising residents about when they need to seek medical care if they are experiencing influenza symptoms. Several hospitals in New Mexico have reported to the Department of Health that they are seeing increased activity of people coming to the hospital with flu symptoms. Some of these people do not need to visit a clinic or emergency room and should stay home until 24 hours after their fever has subsided.

“We’re seeing widespread flu activity in the state and it is important for people to follow our recommendations for seeking medical attention and staying home when sick,” said Health Secretary Alfredo Vigil, MD. “We have to all work together to minimize the spread of the disease and manage our medical resources in the best way possible so we can care for those most at risk for serious complications.”

The Department of Health is recommending the following:

- People who are experiencing typical, mild symptoms of influenza and are not at higher risk for flu complications should stay home and avoid public places until they are well. Typical, mild symptoms include fever, sore throat, and cough.
- People who are experiencing typical, mild symptoms of influenza and are at higher risk for complications should call their healthcare provider or Nurse Advice New Mexico for consideration for treatment with antiviral medications. Nurse Advice New Mexico can be reached toll-free at 866-681-5872.
- People who develop severe symptoms of influenza should seek care immediately from their healthcare provider or the emergency room. Severe symptoms include shortness of breath, rapid breathing, dehydration, or decreased responsiveness.

People who are at higher risk for developing complications from H1N1 and seasonal flu are:

- Children younger than 2 years of age
- Adults 65 years of age and older, and
- Persons with the following conditions:
 - Chronic pulmonary (including asthma), cardiovascular (except hypertension), renal, hepatic, hematological (including sickle cell disease), neurologic, neuromuscular, or metabolic disorders (including diabetes mellitus)
 - Immunosuppression, including that caused by medications or by HIV
 - Pregnant women
 - Persons younger than 19 years of age who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy
 - Residents of nursing homes and other chronic-care facilities

People with influenza in a higher risk group should be treated with antiviral medications ideally within 48 hours after developing symptoms.

To prevent the spread of the flu everyone should wash their hands frequently and cover their mouth and nose when sneezing and coughing. Stay home if you are ill and keep your kids home when they're sick until 24 hours after the fever is gone.

The Department of Health reported Oct. 7 that visits to healthcare providers for influenza-like illness increased to 10.5 percent this week, which is an increase from approximately five percent from the week prior. During the peak of last year's flu season in March of 2009, approximately three percent of all visits to providers were due to influenza-like illness. The number of people who have been hospitalized increased from 85 to 140 people this week.

The hospitalizations by county are as follows: Bernalillo County (16), Chaves County (5), Cibola County (4), Doña Ana County (13), Eddy County (5), Guadalupe County (1), Lea County (2), Lincoln County (2), Los Alamos County (1), Luna County (1), McKinley County (21), Otero County (6), Rio Arriba County (5), Roosevelt County (2), San Juan County (12), Sandoval County (3), Santa Fe County (6), Sierra County (4), Socorro County (4), Taos County (9), Valencia County (3) and 15 cases where residence has not yet been determined.

For more information about H1N1 flu in New Mexico, go online to <http://nmhealth.org/h1n1/index.shtml>.

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