

H1N1 (Swine-origin) Flu Update – May 19, 2009

Current Status: At the national level, activity of the influenza A (H1N1) virus of swine origin is now being reported on a weekly basis. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) tracks U.S. influenza activity through multiple systems. There are higher levels of influenza-like illness in the United States than is normal for this time of year. About half of all influenza viruses being detected are the new H1N1 strain. In our state, a total of 59 confirmed cases have now been identified among Connecticut residents. Cases are from the following counties: Fairfield, 42; Hartford, 7; Litchfield, 1; Middlesex, 1; New Haven, 6; and New London, 2. There have been no confirmed cases in Bristol or Burlington.

Common questions (and answers) the Health District has received in the past few weeks follows. Please contact the Health District at 860-584-7682 if you have additional questions.

Is there a difference between seasonal flu and H1N1 (swine-origin) flu symptoms?

Typical symptoms are the same - fever, cough, headache, body aches, sore throat and runny nose. Laboratory tests are the only way to confirm if it is seasonal flu or the new H1N1 flu. Compared with seasonal flu outbreaks, the overall death rate from the new H1N1 virus is low. However, there is concern because it appears that at least half of the deaths were in healthy people with no underlying medical conditions. Humans do not appear to have the necessary antibodies in their systems to attack the new virus and protect them from illness. At this point, there is no vaccine to prevent someone from getting the new virus – only antiviral medication to treat the symptoms.

How does infection of the new virus occur? Outbreaks are occurring from human-to-human contact. There is no confirmation of transmission between humans and pigs. When an infected person coughs or sneezes, droplets get on his/her hands and other surfaces as well as in the air. When someone touches infected skin or surfaces or is close enough to breathe in contaminated air, he/she may also become infected. That is why regular hand washing and covering of the mouth and nose when coughing/sneezing are so important.

Other methods to help reduce the chances of getting sick include reducing the amount of time spent in crowded settings, improving airflow in your living/working space by opening windows, and practicing good health habits such as adequate sleep, good nutrition, and physical exercise. If you are caring for an ill person and are in close contact with them, you should consider using a mask. More information on face masks can be found on the CDC website at www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/masks.htm.

What should I do if I am sick? You should stay home and keep away from work, school or crowds, rest and drink plenty of fluids. Cover your nose and mouth when coughing and sneezing. Clean your hands often with soap and water or cleanse them with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if no water is available. Use a mask to help contain the spread of droplets when you are around others, but be sure to do so correctly. Let family and friends know about your illness and try to avoid contact with other people. If possible, contact a health professional before traveling to a healthcare facility to discuss whether a medical examination is necessary.

L. Abrahamson, May 19, 2009 6:30 p.m.



BRISTOL-BURLINGTON HEALTH DISTRICT
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