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For more information, please contact:

Colleen Rice, Community Relations Specialist

330-662-0513

crice@medinahealth.org

What you should know about Swine Flu

Medina, Ohio - The Medina County Health Department's Epidemiology Team, consisting of Doctors, Public Health Nurses, and Registered Sanitarians, are in contact with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) regarding the Swine Flu cases in Ohio and other states, Canada, and Mexico. The following information provides information about Swine Flu, what you should know, and what you can do to reduce your risk of infection. There are no reported cases in Medina County.

What is swine flu?

Swine Influenza (swine flu) is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza viruses that causes regular outbreaks in pigs. People do not normally get swine flu, but human infections can and do happen.

Are there human infections with swine flu in the U.S.?

In late March and early April 2009, cases of human infection with swine influenza A (H1N1) viruses were first reported in Southern California and near San Antonio, Texas. Other U.S. states, including Ohio, have reported cases of swine flu infection in humans and cases have been reported internationally as well.

What are the signs and symptoms of swine flu in people?

The symptoms of swine flu in people are similar to the symptoms of regular human flu and include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people have reported diarrhea and vomiting associated with swine flu.

How does swine flu spread?

Spread of this swine influenza A (H1N1) virus is thought to be happening in the same way that seasonal flu spreads. Flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing of people with influenza. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

What can I do to protect myself from getting sick?

There is no vaccine available right now to protect against swine flu. There are everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause respiratory illnesses like influenza. Take these everyday steps to protect your health:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you get sick with influenza, the CDC recommends that you stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

What is the best technique for washing my hands to avoid getting the flu?

Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs. Wash with soap and water or clean with alcohol-based hand cleaner. We recommend that when you wash your hands -- with soap and warm water -- that you wash for 15 to 20 seconds. When soap and water are not available, alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers may be used.

What should I do if I get sick? If you become ill and experience any of the following warning signs, seek emergency medical care. In children emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Fever with a rash

In adults, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting

Can I get swine influenza from eating or preparing pork?

No. Swine influenza viruses are not spread by food. You cannot get swine influenza from eating pork or pork products. Eating properly handled and cooked pork products is safe.

The Medina County Health Department has been providing information on emergency preparedness through newspaper articles and community presentations for the last few years. Copies of previous articles are available at <http://www.medinahealth.org/promo/preparedness.htm>. For more information and the latest information on Swine Flu, visit www.cdc.gov or <http://ohiopandemicflu.gov>.

For more information about our services and programs, please call 330-723-9688 or toll-free at 1-888-723-9688. You can also visit us at www.medinahealth.org. No matter where you live, work, and play, whether you've been to the Health Department or not, we are protecting your health. Services of the Medina County Health Department are partially funded by your local health levy.

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