

H1N1 Flu and You

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Kansas Influenza Activity Remains High

by Dr. Jason Eberhart-Phillips, State Health Officer and Director, KDHE Division of Health



As the 2009 H1N1 influenza A virus continues to circulate in Kansas and throughout the U.S., flu activity in the state remains very high.

Usually at this time of year, about 2 percent of patients seeking care in outpatient clinics around Kansas would be reported as having influenza-like illness. Although we have seen a small decline over the

past two weeks, 5.6 percent of these patients were reported as presenting with flu-like symptoms last week, which is still more than twice the normal level of flu activity, and unprecedented at this time of year.

The Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) performs some monitoring for flu viruses year-round. This allows the department to establish a baseline of what is considered a “normal” level of flu activity. KDHE’s Epidemiology and Surveillance Weekly Status Report provides the most current information and is available at http://www.kdheks.gov/H1N1/H1N1_Epi_Reports.htm. The report provides information on flu-related deaths, as well as information on hospital admissions, school absenteeism and more.

For example, during the first week of November across the state, 16 percent of high schools, 15 percent of middle schools and 11 percent of elementary schools reported to their local health departments that they were experiencing absenteeism rates that are 10 percent or higher. Schools in Kansas normally report a 5 percent absenteeism rate. KDHE has worked with state education officials to provide guidance to schools on how to reduce the spread of pandemic H1N1 and other flu viruses in school settings, as we have done for other types of venues.

Please join me in doing what we can to reduce the spread of pandemic H1N1 flu, and to protect our families and ourselves. Up-to-date information on vaccination clinics being held across the state can be found by going to www.kdheks.gov and clicking on “Where can I receive

the H1N1 vaccine?”. Please be sure to carefully read which groups are being served by these clinics. Although Kansas clinics are now beginning to receive vaccine in somewhat larger quantities than before, local healthcare providers are rightly continuing to make it available only to those who are at greatest risk because the amount of vaccine received overall is still quite limited, especially when compared to the state’s total population.

In addition, everyone should be taking the following steps to limit the spread of flu viruses:

- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer to get rid of most germs and avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- If you become sick, stay home and limit contact with others until at least 24 hours after fever or signs of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications, in order to avoid spreading illness to family members, co-workers and friends.
- Cough or sneeze into a tissue and properly dispose of used tissues. If you do not have a tissue, cover your cough or sneeze with your elbow and not your hands.
- Stay healthy by eating a balanced diet, drinking plenty of water and getting adequate rest and exercise.

KDHE has established a phone number to call with questions about the 2009 H1N1 influenza A virus. The toll-free number is 1-877-427-7317. Operators will be available to answer questions from 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. For more information, please visit <http://kdheks.gov/H1N1> or email H1N1fluinfo@kdheks.gov.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jason Eberhart-Phillips MD".

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