

May 5, 2009

Hospital prepared to handle swine flu

Health officials in Northern Idaho have confirmed the first known case of swine flu in Idaho. If this influenza strain reaches our community, Teton Valley Hospital is ready to provide the appropriate care and resources needed. Prior to and throughout any possible flu outbreak, prevention is essential.

"Wash your hands, wash your hands, wash your hands," says Bonnie Burlage, R.N. and Infection Prevention and Control Nurse for Teton Valley Health Care. "We can do a lot to prevent the spread of swine flu by doing exactly the same things we do to prevent the spread of other contagious illnesses."

Anti-viral medications such as Tamiflu have proven to reduce the severity of swine flu symptoms and the length of the illness. These prescription pharmaceuticals must be taken within 48 hours of the initial symptoms in order to be effective. Available supplies should be sufficient to respond to the needs of our community.

Additionally, face masks and gloves are available for health care providers, first responders and other emergency medical personnel as well as at-risk community groups on an as-needed basis.

Public health agencies and hospital leadership will inform the County if the anti-viral medicines and face masks become necessary for the general public. Antibiotics are not effective for combating influenza.

"In addition to increased hand washing, we need to cover our mouths and noses when coughing or sneezing. Children should be taught to do this out of habit. If you get sick, stay home. People with swine flu may infect others from 1 day before the symptoms start to 7 - 10 days after symptoms begin," continues Burlage, who also serves on the Local Emergency Planning Committee.

"Folks definitely need to seek medical care if they experience breathing difficulties, fever with a rash, chest or abdominal pain, confusion, or severe, persistent vomiting."

For up-to-date accurate information, visit the Center for Disease Control at www.cdc.gov or stay abreast of current data from public health agencies.