

DPH Mounts Response to Swine Flu Outbreak

Week in Review

The Kentucky Department for Public Health (DPH) responded swiftly to increasing concerns over swine flu last week. As the week progressed, numerous operations were put in place in response to the international flu outbreak. Following is a recap of last week's activities.

April 27 – DPH asked health care providers and public health officials to be on alert for potential cases of swine flu.

Kentucky health officials asked Kentuckians who traveled recently to Mexico or other countries or communities within the U.S. where the new H1N1 influenza strain known as swine flu had been reported, or who were planning such travel, be alert for the symptoms of swine flu in the following ways:

- Monitor yourself and travel companions for symptoms of fever, chills, headache, sore throat, cough, body aches, and vomiting or diarrhea.
- If symptoms of illness develop within seven days of travel return, seek evaluation by a health care provider as soon as possible.
- Be sure to tell your health care provider about your recent travel and suggest testing for influenza.
- Stay home from work, school and other public places until you are feeling well.

DPH Commissioner Dr. William D. Hacker and State Epidemiologist Dr. Kraig Humbaugh held a media briefing to update the press and the public about Kentucky's status and efforts regarding swine flu. All major state media outlets attended the briefing.

DPH set up its Department Operations Center (DOC) as its main response headquarters to field calls, receive information and effectively communicate important information about swine flu.

April 28 – DPH continued to monitor the swine flu outbreak. The department worked with the Office of Communications to develop a basic fact sheet for the public that outlines pertinent information about swine flu and what is currently known about how it passes from person-to-person and precautions that can be taken to remain healthy.

April 29 – DPH continued to monitor the swine flu outbreak for any activity in Kentucky. The state lab is active in testing submitted samples for the presence of swine flu. The department joined with the CDC in cautioning Kentuckians to avoid non-essential travel to Mexico.

April 30 – Gov. Steve Beshear and DPH officials announced Kentucky's first reported confirmed case and probable case of swine flu to the CDC.

The confirmed case involves a woman from Warren County who had recently traveled to Mexico. The patient is currently hospitalized in Georgia. The probable case involves an infant from another area in western Kentucky who had been in close contact with an individual who recently traveled to Mexico. The child's family and other close contacts are being evaluated for

illness and possible preventive treatment. The child has not been hospitalized. A sample from the patient has been sent to the CDC for further testing to determine whether swine flu is the cause of illness.

For more information on swine flu, visit <http://cdc.gov/swineflu> or call the CDC's information line at 1-800-232-4636. Individuals can also visit <http://healthalerts.ky.gov> for information on swine flu and Kentucky, or follow KYHealthAlerts on Twitter to be notified when new information is posted at the Web site.

Ten-Ure Conference Planned

The 58th Annual Ten-Ure Convention will be May 6-8 at the Holiday Inn Hurstborne in Louisville. The theme for the convention is "Dealing with the Changing Times in 2009." The conference will offer CEU credits for both social workers and nurses. The Personnel Board will also present a session on the new KHRIS system that will affect all state employees when it is implemented. For more information, visit www.ten-ure.org or contact the organization's president, Gary Brooks. Ten-ure is a state employees' organization with membership to those with over 10 years state employment or who have retired from state government.

Journey to Wellness Update

The Journey to Wellness program is in full swing with multiple activities planned for this spring and summer. Visit this link for more details on what's to come.

<http://www.youtube.com/user/PersonnelKY>

Enjoy Journey to Wellness this spring by taking part in these upcoming activities:

- The six-week Step out Fitness Challenge starts today. Get your scorecard with all instructions included from your Cabinet's wellness liaison or visit this link to download and print your scorecard <http://personnel.ky.gov/NR/rdonlyres/4B7900B2-443E-4863-8E61-41C8FFF9F784/0/StepOutChallengeScorecardpdf.pdf>
- May 13: "Small Steps to a LEANer You" presentation in the Transportation Cabinet Auditorium at 11:30 a.m.
- Health fairs/screenings are being scheduled throughout the coming months by many agencies.
- Farmers' Market visit in June with a cooking demo from some of your favorite cafeteria chefs.

Living Well: Celebrating Earth Day and Going Green

Did you do anything on April 22 to celebrate Earth Day? I asked my daughter on the 22nd if she did anything special for Earth Day, and she said, "No, it was such a boring day we didn't do anything special to celebrate Earth Day!" I then asked what activities she thought her class could have done. She responded with, "We could have picked up trash around the school or planted a tree or a plant." My daughter is only 8, but ready to lead her class in fun Earth Day activities.

All of us recognize the impact we have on the environment, and many of us are taking steps toward making a difference. Here are some simple tips that will both protect your health and the planet.

Take shorter showers - Install a waterproof timer in the shower and set it for five minutes, along with a “low-flow” showerhead. This will conserve water (a family of four can conserve almost 15,000 gallons of water per year) and maintain healthy, better-hydrated skin (hot water strips away the skin’s natural oils).

Skip the dry cleaner - Avoid clothing that says “dryclean only” or search for a cleaner that wet-cleans by using nonhazardous solutions and special equipment. The standard solvents used at local dry cleaners, when broken down, can be either toxic or harmful to the ozone layer. Also, in high doses the standard solvent used called perc (perchloroethylene) for short has been linked to side effects like dizziness, headaches, fatigue, nausea and skin irritation.

Go easy on the beef - Red meat production is responsible for approximately two-and-a-half times more greenhouse gas emissions than chicken or fish. Fish rich in omega-3 fatty acids (help lower triglycerides and blood pressure) like tuna or salmon is not only good for your heart, but can also prevent dry skin. Experts recommend eating fish at least twice a week.

Trash the air fresheners - Studies have proven that indoor air may be up to three times more polluted than the outdoors. A natural alternative would be to place an orange peel mixed with sage in small bowls around your home. The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) tested roughly 14 air fresheners and discovered that 12 contained phthalates, chemicals linked to hormone abnormalities, birth defects and reproductive problems. Some of the tested products claimed to be “all natural.” As well as the phthalates, the air fresheners also contained allergens, volatile organic compounds and cancer-causing chemicals like benzene and formaldehyde.

Drink organic coffee - When buying coffee, look for products that say “certified organic,” “shade grown,” or “fair trade.” These labels ensure that more nutrients were preserved in the production process, and growers are paid a fair price so they do not have to use short cuts to turn a profit. Pesticides and fertilizers used in conventional production may harm soil and contaminate water supplies. Also, fewer synthetic agents and chemicals translate into consumers getting a healthier cup of coffee.

Use bar soap instead of liquid soap - A majority of liquid soaps contain triclosan, an antibiotic agent that is toxic to wildlife. Users can easily overdo it with liquid soap, which can result in drying out your skin, making you more susceptible to germs. Plus, some antibacterial liquid soaps do not deliver on their germ-killing promise.

Get rid of the flea collar - Pesticides in flea collars contain several toxic chemicals as well as possible carcinogens that can contaminate water. These pesticides are designed to obstruct the nervous system of bugs, but they can also interfere with human hormones over time. Instead, wash your pets regularly and wash their bedding in hot water once a week.

If you didn't get a chance to recognize Earth Day this year, use these helpful tips to start leaving less of a carbon footprint. Additionally, these tips will increase your health by eliminating the exposure of harmful chemicals and lessening the body's susceptibility to germs.

Employee Enrichment

By Anya Armes Weber

If you are concerned about the spread of illness at your workplace, you should consider these tips to help stop the sharing of germs.

Wash your hands often. Take frequent breaks to wash or sanitize your hands. Make extra stops to wash after meetings or after working at a public work station. Always wash after using the bathroom, eating, playing outside, playing with pets, coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose.

Wash thoroughly. Many people unknowingly skip this tip. Use hot water and soap. Scrub for at least 15 to 20 seconds. Anything less won't be effective. Parents tell children to sing "Happy Birthday" because that's about the amount of time it takes to effectively wash.

Watch what you touch. Hands off elevator buttons, door handles and handrails if you can manage it.

Don't touch your face. At least don't touch your face with unwashed hands.

Limit personal contact. Avoid handshakes. Don't get too close to a sick person. Every time they exhale, respiratory viruses come out, creating a cloud of germs around them.

Don't go to work if you're sick. Be mindful of your co-workers and your own health. See a professional for treatment, and get your rest.