

Kentucky Asks Health Care Providers to Be Alert for Possible Swine Influenza Cases

Public Health Requests Share of Federal Medical Supplies as Precaution

The Kentucky Department for Public Health (KDPH) is asking health care providers and public health officials to be on the alert for potential cases of swine influenza (swine flu) in Kentucky.

“We are closely monitoring developments involving swine flu cases in the United States, Mexico and abroad,” said Public Health Commissioner William Hacker, M.D. “We continue to provide information to health care providers and other stakeholders about this evolving situation, and are preparing for a wider response should that become necessary.”

While no cases have yet been confirmed in Kentucky, KDPH is asking that physicians, hospitals, public health workers and other health care providers submit samples from any patient testing positive for influenza A or that a health care provider strongly suspects might be infected with swine flu to the State Public Health Laboratory for further testing.

The State Public Health Laboratory can test to determine if the illness is caused by human influenza. Samples that require further evaluation will be sent to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which has the capability to determine whether a patient is infected with the new strain of swine flu. Two documents providing initial guidance were sent to health care providers by KDPH on April 27, 2009, and include links to case definitions for the suspect, probable and confirmed case designations: “Letter to Clinicians” and “Surveillance and Specimen Collection for Swine Influenza A.” [See pages 17 and 20, Ed.] Guidance will be updated as new information becomes available.

The federal government has declared a state of public health emergency to allow federal, state and local governments to prepare for the need for additional response efforts. As part of that declaration, states may request 25 percent of allotted supplies and countermeasures for pandemic influenza, such as antiviral drugs and masks, held by the Strategic National Stockpile. Kentucky has asked for these supplies to be delivered to the state as a precautionary measure, and has been informed they should arrive within approximately one week.

“Kentucky’s public health officials and medical community have been preparing for widespread cases of a new strain of influenza, often referred to as pandemic flu, for several years,” said Gov. Steve Beshear. “That preparation is allowing us to quickly coordinate the appropriate response to protect Kentuckians.”

KDPH also asks that Kentuckians who may have traveled recently to Mexico or other affected areas, or who are 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 influenza-like 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.

As always, KDPH reminds individuals to take common sense precautions to prevent illness, including: avoiding close contact with those who are ill; staying home when sick; covering the mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing; avoiding touching the eyes, nose or mouth; and frequent hand washing.

The number of swine flu cases in the U.S. continues to grow. The World Health Organization and CDC have reported numerous human cases of a severe respiratory illness in at least three different regions of Mexico, and reports are now coming in from additional countries. The number of cases has risen steadily since the beginning of April 2009. Laboratory testing of patient specimens has confirmed infections with swine influenza ("swine flu") A/H1N1 virus. This is a newly emerging, animal-origin virus that is now being spread from an infected person to another person.

For the latest national information on swine flu, visit: <http://cdc.gov/swineflu>. New information about swine flu in Kentucky, including numbers of probable and confirmed cases, if any, will be posted daily at: <http://healthalerts.ky.gov>.

- Communications Office staff report, Health and Family Services Cabinet.