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Second H1N1 Death Reported in Milwaukee

Health officials stress that virus remains prevalent in our community

A second death from the novel H1N1 infection has been confirmed in Milwaukee, health officials said Friday. The case involves an adult who apparently did not have any of the common underlying medical conditions that typically make people more at risk of influenza complications.

This is the second such death for the city and for Wisconsin. The City of Milwaukee Health Department reported the first death, a Milwaukee adult who did have a common underlying medical condition, on June 4.

“We can not stress enough that swine flu continues to be a serious concern throughout the nation and within our community,” said Commissioner of Health Bevan K. Baker.

“It is pertinent that anyone experiencing signs of respiratory illness such as fever, cough, or sore throat stay home. Do not go to work or school,” he said. “In addition, it’s still extremely important for people to continue good hygiene practices, such as frequent hand-washing and covering your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing.”

Swine flu spreads person to person when a person infected with the flu coughs or sneezes and the uninfected person breathes in the virus. Staying home when ill is very important to prevent exposing high-risk individuals, such as pregnant women or people with weak immune systems, to this new virus.

“The H1N1 virus remains prevalent in our community,” said Mayor Tom Barrett. “I once again urge everyone to follow the recommendations given by the Health Department to slow the spread of this disease in our community.”

As of Friday, there were 1,883 confirmed cases of swine flu reported in Milwaukee. MHD expects this number to increase due to continued spread of the disease in the community as well as the department’s continued surveillance and testing for this disease. As the total number of cases rise, the number of hospitalizations and deaths can also be expected to rise locally as well as nationally.

Conditions that make people more at risk for complications of influenza include: age of 65 or older, age under 5, pregnancy, diabetes, lung problems including asthma and emphysema, certain heart conditions, diseases or medications that weaken the immune system, kidney diseases, children on chronic aspirin treatment, and some other chronic medical problems.

Health officials again stressed that mildly ill individuals should call their doctor to find out if antiviral treatment is needed. If you are only mildly ill, it is better to call your doctor first, as some situations can be managed by phone. Mildly ill individuals should not go to the emergency department unless instructed to do so by your doctor. However, people whose condition seems to be worsening should not delay in being seen by a medical professional.

Some ways to stay healthy and to protect yourself and those around you from getting the flu include:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with your upper sleeve. If you use a tissue, throw it away after one use.
- Use your own drinking cups and straws.
- Avoid being exposed to people who are sick with flu-like symptoms.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Eat nutritious meals, get plenty of rest, and do not smoke.

As previously reported, MHD has partnered with researchers from the Harvard University School of Public Health to study data generated from the outbreak response in the City of Milwaukee. Since early in the outbreak, the number of cases in Milwaukee has been consistently higher than what has been confirmed in most other US states.

The collaboration with Harvard researchers will assist Milwaukee public health officials in better characterizing the magnitude and spread of disease in the community, as well as study transmissibility patterns in clustered settings such as households and schools. This information in turn may provide validation on whether the high number of confirmed cases in the City is related to early enhanced surveillance by the MHD, aggressive testing and excellent laboratory capacity locally and state-wide, earlier exposure and more widespread disease than other municipalities, or some other variables.

To learn more about swine influenza, visit <http://pandemic.wisconsin.gov/> or www.milwaukee.gov/health. Or visit us on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/MKEhealth> or in Spanish at <http://twitter.com/MKEsalud>.