



Tom Barrett
Mayor

Bevan K. Baker, FACHE
Commissioner of Health

Health Department Administration

Frank P. Zeidler Municipal Building, 841 North Broadway, 3rd Floor, Milwaukee, WI 53202-3653 phone (414) 286-3521 fax (414) 286-5990
web site: www.milwaukee.gov/health

For Immediate Release
July 14, 2009

Media Contact:

Kawanza Newson
414-286-3548 Office
414-732-7250 Mobile

Fourth H1N1 Death Reported in Milwaukee

Health Officials Preparing for Fall Re-emergence of Virus

A fourth death from the novel H1N1 influenza infection has been confirmed in Milwaukee, health officials said Tuesday. The case involves an adolescent who had a common underlying medical condition. This is the fifth known death from novel H1N1 for Wisconsin. The City of Milwaukee Health Department has previously reported two adult deaths and one adolescent death from the virus.

“The Milwaukee Health Department continues to receive new case reports daily, though the volume has significantly decreased,” said Commissioner of Health Bevan K. Baker. “We expected this reduction in new cases to happen over the summer, and we are also expecting our numbers to significantly increase again this fall.”

“Further, we realize that influenza viruses can mutate and change their behavior,” Baker said. “That is why we are continuing to refine our pandemic response plan, why we are preparing for mass vaccination efforts in the fall, and why we reserve the right to return to more aggressive social distancing mechanisms if public health surveillance indicates that severity of illness is becoming worse over time.”

Swine flu, like regular seasonal influenza, 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.

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.

It’s also important to remember that influenza can be fatal even to healthy individuals, although they are at lower risk than those with underlying illness. Therefore, people with respiratory illness whose condition seems to be worsening should not delay in being seen by a medical professional, regardless of their underlying health status.

Health officials again stressed that mildly ill individuals whose condition is not worsening 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 their doctor.

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 reported 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 better understanding 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>.