Health Alert to Schools

Swine Influenza

Swine Influenza (swine flu) is a respiratory disease which occurs regularly in pigs and is caused by type A influenza viruses. Currently, one of these viruses has caused human illness in California, other States, and in other parts of the world, especially Mexico.

There have been no cases of swine flu in San Luis Obispo County at this time.

Symptoms of flu include fever (usually high), headache, extreme tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, and muscle aches. Nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea also can occur.

Who is at risk for having swine flu and should consult their doctor:

Persons with a fever higher than 100 F (37.8 C) and a cough and/or sore throat AND who

- have had contact with a confirmed swine influenza H1N1 case
- are in a high-risk setting for transmission; e.g. school or daycare setting.
- have returned from Mexico within 7 days of illness onset

Infection Control

- Remind children and staff to use soap and water to wash hands when hands are visibly soiled, or an alcohol-based hand cleaner when soap and water are not available and hands are not visibly soiled.
- Remind parents and staff that children and employees should stay at home during their illness, generally 5-7 days for adults, up to 10 days for children.
- Teach children to wash hands for 15-20 seconds (long enough to sing “Happy Birthday” song twice).
- Ensure that sink locations and restrooms are stocked with soap, paper towels or working hand dryers.
- Keep the school environment clean and make sure that supplies are available. Clean frequently touched surfaces and commonly shared items at least daily and when visibly soiled.
- Use an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-registered household disinfectant labeled for activity against bacteria and viruses, an EPA-registered hospital disinfectant, or EPA-registered chlorine bleach/hypochlorite solution. Always follow label instructions when using any EPA-registered disinfectant. If EPA-registered chlorine bleach is not available and a generic (i.e., store brand) chlorine bleach is used, mix ¼ cup chlorine bleach with 1 gallon of cool water.
- Advise children and care providers to cough or sneeze into a shirt sleeve or cover their noses and mouths with a tissue, and to put used tissue in a waste basket followed by hand cleansing.

For additional information about swine flu, please see: http://www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/ or www.cdc.gov/flu/swine or call San Luis Obispo Public Health at 781-5500.
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The CDC (Centers for Disease Control) reports that there have been 7 confirmed cases of Swine Flu in California as of 4/26/09. A new flu virus spreads more easily because people have not built up immunity to it and nearly everyone is at risk. There is no need to overreact but in light of this, we all need to be especially diligent in preventing the spread of infection.

The primary way that illnesses like colds and flu are spread is from person to person by coughs and sneezes. This can happen when droplets from a cough or sneeze of an infected person move through the air and make contact with the mouth or nose of people nearby. Droplets can also make contact with environmental surfaces like table tops. The virus can then be spread from those surfaces if a person touches the droplets and then touches another inanimate object. He or she can become infected if they touch their own eyes, mouth or nose before washing his or her hands. Flu viruses can live 2 hours or longer on hard environmental surfaces. There are things we can do at school and at home.

What You Can Do to Stay Healthy and Protect Your Family
- Teach your children to wash their hands frequently with soap and water for 20 seconds (for younger children - the time it takes to sing Happy Birthday twice). Be sure to set a good example by doing this yourself.
- Teach your children to cough and sneeze into their elbow instead of their hand.
- Teach your children to stay at least three feet away from people who are sick.
- Children who are sick should be kept home and avoid other people until they are better.
- Students should not share food or beverages.
- All used tissues should be discarded immediately in a trash container followed by handwashing.
- If handwashing is not convenient, alcohol based sanitizer should be used.
- Keep hands away from your face, eyes and mouth.
- Clean frequently used hard surfaces such as doorknobs, countertops, light switches, telephones, refrigerator handles and microwaves with a disinfectant.

At school, we will review frequent handwashing, use of hand sanitizer, appropriate coughing and sneezing into your elbow rather than into your hand and disposal of used tissues. We will also send home children who appear ill. It will be extremely helpful if you will also reinforce these concepts with your child as well as keep your child home if he/she is ill. The three primary symptoms of flu are fever, cough and sore throat.

At this time, we have no report of any case of Swine Flu in our county. The most important step we can take is prevention of illness by focusing on the above practices. The school district will keep you informed of any outbreaks and we are developing a plan to deal with a serious outbreak should one occur. To learn more about pandemic influenza, visit www.pandemicflu.gov. If you have any questions, please call me at 434-5824.

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