



News Release

Arkansas Department of Health

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Health Department Announces First H1N1 Influenza A Virus (Swine Flu) Cases in Arkansas

(LITTLE ROCK) — Paul Halverson, State Health Officer and Director of the Arkansas Department of Health (ADH), said today that the state's first five cases of the novel H1N1 influenza A virus (swine flu) have been confirmed—four cases in Pulaski County and one case in Lawrence County. The samples were tested and confirmed by the public health laboratory at ADH.

Illness has occurred in active duty service members from other states who are training at Camp Robinson. Service officials have notified other co-workers, family and friends who may have been in close contact with the patients.

A school-aged child from Walnut Ridge Elementary School in Lawrence County has also been confirmed positive for the virus.

"We felt certain that we would eventually see some cases of the novel H1N1 virus here in Arkansas," Halverson said. "As the result of these diagnoses, we will be monitoring the conditions of close contacts of the patients in an effort to slow the spread for as long as we can. The good news is that the cases we have been seeing in the United States, for the most part, have been relatively mild and treatable with antiviral medications, such as Tamiflu and Relenza."

"Since Camp Robinson attracts over 30,000 service members annually from all 50 states and four territories, we anticipated the potential of this occurring on our training site," said Maj. Gen. William Wofford, the adjutant general of Arkansas. "Due to the proactive measures of our schools and medical professionals to plan for this exact scenario, along with close coordination with the Arkansas Department of Health, we were as prepared as possible for this situation."

"Once the first case was identified, steps were immediately taken to contain the spread of the illness we were dealing with," General Wofford said.

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Dr. Halverson said, “Now that we know we have the disease in the state, it is not necessary to test every suspected case. It is important to reserve testing materials for those most at risk for complications from the virus — those who are hospitalized with influenza-like illness, as well as pregnant women, and healthcare workers.

Dr. Halverson added, “In the meantime, we continue to urge Arkansans to follow the personal protection guidelines that have been recommended throughout the outbreak: frequent hand washing, avoiding those who are ill and covering your mouth and nose with a tissue if you cough or sneeze. Symptoms of the swine flu are the same as those for seasonal flu: fever, body aches, coughing, sneezing and, sometimes, nausea, diarrhea and vomiting. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance for what people should do has shifted to reflect a response that is similar to what folks need to do for seasonal flu. If you have symptoms, please stay home. Call your doctor for advice on how to treat your illness.” Halverson said.

The Health Department has been in close contact with hospitals, physicians, schools, child care facilities, laboratories, and regional and local health officials throughout the state to provide guidance and monitor the number and location of suspected cases of illness.

“Working with the Health Department, we have kept school district administrators, school administrators and school nurses informed of appropriate steps to take in the event of a confirmed case on a daily basis,” said Dr. Ken James, Arkansas Commissioner of Education. “I have every confidence that our school officials will take appropriate steps to safeguard the health of our students.”

It is important to note that recommendations from the ADH concerning contracting the disease are based on the best information and guidance developed by the CDC. The new guidance for schools from the CDC provides the following direction:

- School closure is not advised for a suspected or confirmed case of new influenza A (H1N1) and, in general, is not advised unless there is a magnitude of faculty or student absenteeism that interferes with the school’s ability to function.
- Students, faculty or staff with influenza-like illness (fever with a cough or sore throat) should stay home and not attend school or go into the community except to seek medical care for at least 7 days even if symptoms resolve sooner.
- Students, faculty and staff who are still sick 7 days after they become ill should continue to stay home from school until symptom-free for at least 24 hours.
- Students, faculty and staff who appear to have an influenza-like illness at arrival or become ill during the school day should be isolated promptly in a room separate from other students and sent home.
- Parents and guardians should monitor their school-aged children, and faculty and staff should self-monitor every morning for symptoms of influenza-like illness.
- Ill students should not attend alternative child care or congregate in other settings.
- School administrators should communicate regularly with local public health officials to obtain guidance about reporting of influenza-like illnesses in the school.

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- Schools can help serve as a focus for educational activities aimed at promoting ways to reduce the spread of influenza, including hand hygiene and cough etiquette.
- Students, faculty and staff should stringently follow sanitary measures to reduce the spread of influenza, including covering their nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing (or coughing or sneezing into their sleeve if a tissue isn't available), frequently washing hands with soap and water, or using hand sanitizer if hand washing with soap and water is not possible.

Dr. Halverson said further, "It's important during this critical time for people to continue to take steps to prevent contracting disease. We know that our citizens are concerned. There are many things we can all do to protect ourselves."

The following are some simple preparations Arkansans can make now:

- As always, people with febrile respiratory illness should stay home from work or school to avoid spreading infections, including flu, to others in the community.
- People experiencing cough, fever and fatigue, possibly along with diarrhea and vomiting, should contact their physician.
- Drugs called antivirals can reduce the severity of illness, if taken within 48 hours after symptoms begin.
- Individuals who are 18 years of age or younger who are ill with flu should not take aspirin, but can take ibuprofen or acetaminophen.
- Avoid close contact with people who are coughing or otherwise appear ill.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Wash hands frequently to lessen the spread of respiratory illness. The key is to wash thoroughly with warm, soapy water, and to wash frequently.
- When hand washing is not possible, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Cover your mouth and nose with tissue when coughing and sneezing.
- Swine flu viruses are not transmitted by food and a person cannot get swine flu from eating pork products.
- Have a good family preparedness plan. Know what you are going to do should a family member become ill.
- Keep a supply of items on hand such as tissues, over-the-counter medications and a digital thermometer.
- Wipe down any surfaces that may have been contaminated by saliva or other respiratory secretions. Use a household disinfectant labeled for use against bacteria and viruses or mix and use one part household bleach to 10 parts water.

For more information on new influenza A H1N1(swine flu), call **800-651-3493** or click on: www.healthyarkansas.com or <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/whatsnew.htm>.

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