



Charlie Crist
Governor

Ana M. Viamonte Ros, M.D., M.P.H..
State Surgeon General

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CONTACT: TIM O'CONNOR
561-355-3576 FAX 355-3038

HEALTH DEPARTMENT RESPONDS TO INFLUENZA A-- H1N1

PALM BEACH COUNTY, FL To date no cases of the Influenza A H1N1 flu have been identified in Florida. 11 states within the U.S., according to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention along with several countries have confirmed cases.

"I would like to emphasize that there are many good precautions people can take to prevent getting the flu. I encourage all to wash their hands regularly, cover your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing and stay home if you are sick," said Jean Malecki, MD, Director, Palm Beach County Health Department. **"I would also like to add that protective masks and respirators are not warranted or encouraged to be worn at this time."**

The CDC on its website has also recommended that masks should not be worn and is continuing its studies on the actual protection from the flu they may provide. Children may develop respiratory problems if their breathing is impaired, others can develop rash, infections and other problems with extended use as evidenced following the SARS outbreak several years ago.

Dr. Malecki added that Palm Beach County has been preparing for several years for a flu event that affects a broad area occurs.

The State of Florida has also prepared for influenza events:

- All state laboratories have the facilities to safely identify influenza samples and the health department is prepared to facilitate the handling of those samples.
- The state has almost 100 sentinel physicians who report any unusual influenza like activity to DOH and the CDC. Palm Beach County has five sentinel physicians from the group.
- We have the ability to monitor the sale of over the counter drugs, as an early warning sign for increased influenza activity.

The Palm Beach County Health Department is providing the following recommendations:

- As always, people with respiratory illness should stay home from work or school to avoid spreading infections, including influenza, to others in the community.
- 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.
- People experiencing cough, fever and fatigue, sore throat, possibly along with diarrhea and vomiting, should contact their physician.
- If you think you have influenza, please call your health care provider and discuss whether you need to be seen in their office or emergency department or stay home.

H1N1 influenza is not transmitted by food or from eating pork products. The infections appear to spread from person to person. Drugs called antivirals can reduce the consequences of contracting the flu, if taken early.

Palm Beach County Health Department is prepared to answer questions as the heightened surveillance for H1N1flu continues. Residents can contact any of our Health Centers in Jupiter, West Palm Beach, Lantana, Delray Beach, Belle Glade and Pahokee or through the main number at 561-840-4500. Two websites are also updated regularly www.pbchd.com or www.cdc.gov.



Post office Box 29 / 826 Evernia Street, West Palm Beach, FL 33402
Jean M. Malecki, MD, MPH, FACPM, Director
www.pbchd.com