

Medical providers prepare for flu season

The Cheyenne County Hospital providers have serious concerns about the seasonal and novel H1N1 flu.

Influenza, better known as the "flu," is an infection of the nose, throat and lungs caused by influenza viruses. Each year, these viruses cause illness, hospital stays and deaths in the United States.

There are many different flu viruses and sometimes a new virus emerges. Novel H1N1 flu is a new and very different virus that is spreading worldwide. This new virus was called "swine flu" at first because, in the past, it had pieces of viruses found in pigs. However, the novel H1N1 virus has not been detected in U.S. pigs.

Influenza is unpredictable, but scientists believe that the new virus may cause a lot more people to get sick in the upcoming flu season.

Flu can be very serious, especially for younger children and people of any age who have one or more chronic medical conditions, said Dr. Mary Beth Miller, physician at the Cheyenne County Hospital.

These conditions include asthma or other lung problems, diabetes, weakened immune systems, kidney disease, heart problems and neurological and neuromuscular disorders.

Symptoms of the seasonal and novel H1N1 flu, Dr. Miller said, include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people may also have vomiting and diarrhea.

People infected with either type of the flu shed virus may be able to infect others from one day before getting sick to five to seven days after symptoms occur. This can be longer in some people, Dr. Miller said, especially children, people with weakened immune systems and those infected with the new flu virus.

Both the seasonal and new flu are thought to spread mostly from person to person through the coughs and sneezes of people who are sick with influenza. People may also get sick by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching



Dr. Miller



DR. MARY BETH MILLER listens to Gerri McCurry's heart during a check up Wednesday afternoon. Dr. Miller urges all residents to be aware of the N1H1 flu virus.

their month or nose. "Community members should get a seasonal flu vaccine for yourself and your children to help protect against seasonal flu virus," said Dr. Rebecca Allard, physician at the hospital. "You should take everyday steps to prevent the spread of all flu viruses."

There will be a vaccine to protect the public against novel H1N1 flu, Dr. Allard said.

The vaccine is being produced and will be available in the coming months as an option for the prevention of the new flu. One unique aspect of the novel H1N1 flu vaccine is the age groups that are targeted for vaccination.

For the normal seasonal flu vaccine, targets are people over the age of 65, children, 6 months to 18 years, those with chronic medical conditions, healthcare workers and

any others who wish to protect themselves and their families against the seasonal flu.

For the H1N1 vaccine, initial targets are pregnant women, household contacts and caregivers of infants less than 6 months of age, healthcare workers, children 6 months to 4 years, and children over 4 years who have chronic medical conditions.

As the supply of the novel H1N1 vaccines increases, the target will be expanded to include school-age children and people 25 to 64 years of age with chronic medical conditions.

Unlike the normal seasonal flu vaccine, Dr. Allard said, those people 65 years and over are not targeted for this vaccine until the rest of the public has been vaccinated. Studies have shown that people in this age range are not affected as much by the virus and may have some immunity from exposure to similar viruses in the past.

In addition, the novel H1N1 virus typically targets the younger population. According to the Kansas Department of Health and Environment statistics, 80 percent of infected people in the state have been under 35 years old and the median age has been 17 years.



Dr. Allard

Drugs that treat the virus

With flu season almost here, physicians and physician assistants at the Cheyenne County Hospital are prepared to help their patients with specific drugs.

There are anti-viral drugs that can treat both seasonal flu and the new H1N1 flu, said Tyler Raile, physician assistant. "These drugs can make people feel better and get better sooner," he said. "But, they need to be prescribed by your medical provider and work best when started during the first two days of illness."

However, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is limiting the use of these anti-virals during this flu season, he said. Reports have already surfaced of anti-viral resistant flu strains and the overuse of these anti-virals could increase the incidence of this.

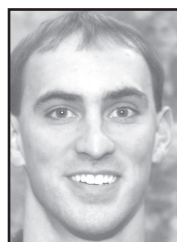
Anti-virals will only be prescribed to pregnant women, those with severe flu symptoms, hospitalized patients and those at high risk for complications from the flu virus.

In the past, Cheyenne County Clinic providers have offered prophylactic treatment to family members of those testing positive for the flu virus.

"Due to the restrictions on these drugs, we cannot offer that this year," he said. The only people who will be offered prophylactic treatment are those at high risk for complications and who have come in contact with a person confirmed with the virus."



Kristle Raile



Tyler Raile

Children with flu-like symptoms

If another healthy individual, ages 5 or older, gets flu-like symptoms, Kristle Raile, physician assistant said,

consult your medical provider if needed and make sure the ill person gets plenty of rest and drinks enough fluids. Symptoms include a fever and cough and/or sore throat.

Use over-the-counter medications as needed to help alleviate symptoms.

While it is important to consult a medical provider, she said, a visit to the clinic is not always necessary or recommended. In fact, one of the key factors in slowing the spread of the disease is the isolation of the sick person.

"All people with flu-like symptoms should stay home from daycare, school, work and other public places until they have been fever free — without the use of fever-reducing medications — for at least 24 hours.

If a child younger than 5 years, or an individual of any age who has a medical condition like asthma, diabetes, or a neurological problem and develops symptoms, including a fever and cough and/or sore throat, call the clinic and seek medical attention, she said.

"This is because younger children and those who have chronic medical conditions may be at a higher risk of serious complications from

influenza, including the new H1N1 strain.

If the following symptoms occur, take the ill person to the doctor right away:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing.
- Bluish or gray skin color.
- Not drinking enough fluids.
- Severe or persistent vomiting.
- Not waking up or not interacting.
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held.
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever or worse cough.

Prevent spreading flu viruses

There are everyday steps to preventing the spread of all flu viruses. They include:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Throw the tissue in the trash after it is used.
- Wash hands often with soap and water, especially after coughing or sneezing. If soap and water are not available, alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Throw tissues and other disposable items used by sick people in the house in the trash.
- Avoid having close contact (about 6 feet) with sick people, including anyone in the house who is sick.
- Keep surfaces like bedside tables, surfaces in the bathroom, kitchen counters, door knobs and toys clean by wiping them down with a household disinfectant (follow the directions on the label).
- Teach children to take these actions, too.

McDonald News

George Vandegriffe of Atwood was a Sunday visitor of Ray and Marlene Johnson.

Travis Knapp of Hutchinson came home on Saturday morning and will spend the week helping his dad, Jerry Knapp, to drill wheat.

R.J. and Susie Sabatka spent the weekend in Manhattan with Jon and Rachel Mallett and family.

They attended the football game in which their grandson, Taylor, was playing.

Bruce and Shirley Swihart of St. Francis were Saturday afternoon visitors of Eleanor Swihart.

Robin Miller and her mother, Janice Harris, of Arkansas were weekend guests of Gail and Kay Miller, returning home on Monday.

On Sunday, Gail and Kay Miller, Randy and Sue Miller, and Twila Miller attended the 50th wedding anniversary of Lila and Howard Runge in Culbertson.

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4-H Section

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